

**AUTHORISED BY:** Chief Officer

**DATE:** December 2021

1. **OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE:**

Stress Management is one of a number of health and safety standards forming the Trust’s Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy written arrangements in compliance with general duties under the [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1974/37/contents)

This standard outlines the arrangements implemented by the Trust, to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and manage and reduce the risks associated with work related stress.

The key objectives of this standard are to increase awareness of the impact of stress and to provide information about the support mechanisms, interventions and systems available to manage stress.

1. **RESPONSIBILITY:**

Overall responsibility for the implementation of this standard belongs to the Executive Management Team and Development Managers.

Managers, with the support of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Health and Safety must ensure arrangements are fully implemented within their areas of control**.**

Services should supplement these arrangements with written details of the local provisions in place, such as any stress risk assessments carried out and/ or action plans prepared to reduce stress risks within the work area. Services should retain documentary evidence of any measures introduced, which will be subject to audit.

**CONTENTS**

**1** [**INTRODUCTION 2**](#_Toc496001908)

**2** [**WHAT IS STRESS 3**](#_Toc496001909)

2.1 Definitions 3

2.2 Signs of Stress 3

**3 DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITES 4**

3.1 Executive Management 4

3.2 Managers 4

3.3 Employee Relations 5

3.4 The Health and Safety Section 5

3.4.1 Healthy Working Lives 5

3.5 Organisational Development 6

3.5.1 B.E.S.T. Practice 7

3.6 Occupational Health Support and Employee Counselling Services 7

3.7 Employees 7

**4 STRESS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES 7**

4.1 Introduction 7

4.2 Informal Interventions 8

4.3 Early Intervention 9

4.4 Stress Risk Assessment for Indivisuals or Small Teams 9

**5 FURTHER INFORMATION 10**

Appendix 1: Stress Risk Asessment 11

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have identified work related stress, including anxiety and depression, as the principal cause of working days lost through injury or ill health.

The latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show the number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in 2018/19 was 602,000, a prevalence rate of 1,800 per 100,000 workers. This equates to 12.8 million working days lost in the UK during this period.

The [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/438/introduction/made) specifically require that risks to which employees are exposed at work, are identified and controlled as far as reasonable.

The requirement to assess risk includes risks associated with work related stress, which can have a significantly negative impact on both the mental and physical wellbeing of employees.

It should also be recognised that pressures outside the workplace, such as personal issues or bereavement, can have an overall impact on an individual’s mental wellbeing and their ability to cope while they are at work.

People have different levels of tolerance to pressure and different coping mechanisms to deal with it. Some people may be reluctant to admit that they are experiencing stress and it is therefore important that managers adopt a supportive approach towards members of their team, which enables individuals to feel able to speak openly.

It is equally important that where employees feel that they may be experiencing stress related symptoms or require additional support, that they approach their line manager at the earliest opportunity to seek appropriate assistance. Should an individual not feel able to approach their line manager for any reason, they can seek assistance from Human Resources or Trade Union Representative or by self-referring to Occupational Health Services or Employee Counselling Services.

The Trust recognises the importance of having effective management arrangements in place in order to support and maintain employee health and wellbeing and to underpin the continued commitment to the health and wellbeing objectives, outlined within the Healthy Working Lives scheme.

In order to effectively manage the risks associated with stress, the Trust has put in place the following processes and interventions:

* Training courses delivered by Organisational Development
* Stress risk assessments for individuals and small groups
* Wellbeing initiatives and supports through Healthy Working Lives
* Flexible working schemes, career break, job sharing etc.
* Supports through Occupational Health and Employee Counselling Services

# 2. WHAT IS STRESS?

**2.1 Definitions**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as being **‘the reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them’.**

It is important to recognise that not all pressure at work will result in adverse health effects and that in many instances, some level of pressure can actually help to improve motivation and performance at work. However, when pressure reaches a point where an individual can no longer cope, it can result in a negative impact on mental wellbeing and/or physical health.

**Diagrams 1. Pressure performance stages**

Fantasy

Comfort

Fatigue

Poor performance Panic

Boredom

Ill health

Stress in itself is not a medical condition but prolonged exposure to stress is linked to psychological conditions such as anxiety and depression as well as physical symptoms such as heart disease and musculoskeletal problems.

Excess stress can also have a significant impact on employee performance, motivation, increased levels of sickness absence and loss of productivity. Suitable management interventions are therefore critical to help managers and employees understand and recognise the nature and causes of stress and enable them to take positive action to manage it effectively.

**2.2 Signs of stress**

The way people cope with stress varies, which in some cases can make it difficult to identify. It is therefore important that both managers and employees learn to recognise the more common signs of stress and also have an understanding of the procedures and interventions, which the Trust provides to manage stress risks, as far as reasonably practical.

Some common indicators of stress may include:

* + - Loss of concentration
    - Low self esteem
    - Quiet/ withdrawn
    - Anxious
    - Shortened temper
    - Disturbed sleep/ fatigue
    - Changes in appetite
    - Increased alcohol consumption, smoking or drug taking
    - Headaches
    - Stomach complaints
    - Back/ neck pain

Individuals should be encouraged to seeking help and support when required and managers should aim to create an environment where employees feel that they can openly raise any concerns they may be experiencing.

# 3. DUTIES AND RESPONSBILITIES

**3.1 Executive Management**

Executive Management have a key role in the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing at work. Officers should fully support Managers to allow them to effectively manage any stress related issues, within areas under their control. This should include ensuring that all mandatory requirements set out in this Standard and any related HR Policies and Procedures are complied with.

**3.2 Managers**

Managers are critical in their role of promoting and supporting the positive mental health of employees and can help to create a culture of wellbeing within the workplace. The actions of managers can significantly influence whether employees are protected from or exposed to excessive pressure at work.

By working closely and communicating openly with their team, managers should be able to identify the common signs of stress at an early stage, which will in turn enable them to implement suitable and proportionate intervention measures.

One of the most important elements of positive stress management is effective communication between managers and employees, particularly where there are organisational or procedural changes, which may increase the risk of stress within the workplace.

By having a better understanding of the possible causes of work related pressures and by adopting a proactive and supportive approach towards their team, managers can recognise stress risks within their work area and importantly, take these risks into consideration when organising and planning future work.

**3.3 Employee Relations**

The Head of Corporate Services in conjunction with the Council’s Human Resources Service can provide advice and support to managers and employees on positive mental health and wellbeing at work, including advice on the stress risk assessment processes.

Where it has been identified that employees are experiencing illnesses related to stress, whether work related or non-work related, support can be:

* + - Providing advice and guidance to managers of the interventions available to manage stress
    - Providing confidential and professional advice for employees who may be experiencing symptoms related to stress
    - Referring employees to counselling services for confidential support, where required
    - Facilitating return to work programmes with line managers, for employees who have been absent from work as a result of stress
    - Monitoring statistics on stress to enable suitable interventions to be put in place, where appropriate
    - Referring employees who are absent with stress to Occupational Health Service, in line with the [Supporting Attendance at Work Policy](https://leisurenet/media/1863/supporting-attendance-at-work-policy.doc)

**3.4 Health and Safety Section**

The Council Health and Safety Section are available to respond to general enquiries about stress management processes and provide advice on carrying out risk assessments, organising and facilitating focus groups and helping to address matters raised during the stress risk assessment process.

**3.4.1Wellbeing & Support**

Being in work is known to be good for people’s health and wellbeing and creating a positive, safe and healthy environment for employees can increase morale, improve work-life balance and, in turn, positively impact the services the Trust provides.

We work closely with the Council and support Healthy Working Lives (HWL); a nationally recognised scheme which helps organisations to create healthier and safer workplaces by providing resources, information and opportunities to improve employee health and wellbeing, both at work and at home.

Within our staff intranet, <https://leisurenet/> there are numerous resources in the Support & Wellbeing section, including information about accessing help with alcohol, drugs and smoking, guidance on how to support children and young people and links to a variety of external organisations who can provide further specific guidance and support, including links to [Healthy Working Lives](http://eacintranet/Services/Healthy-Working-Lives/Healthy-Working-Lives.aspx) .

HWL produce regular Bulletins and an EAC Intranet page full of additional advice and tips on how to help with anxiety and stress as well as useful information about healthy eating and being more physically active.

**3.5 Organisational Development**

The Council’s Organisational Development Section provides a range of learning and development activities which enable managers and employees to recognise and manage the risks associated with poor mental health and promote positive wellbeing in the workplace.

Supporting Wellbeing is a training course for all employees and encompasses previous stress training courses i.e. Management of Workplace Stress, Mentally Healthy Workplace Training and a Positive Approach to Handling Stress. The objectives of the course are to:

* + - * Identify that when wellbeing is being challenged, there is a risk of stress having a negative impact and how to manage this
      * Apply a range of measures pro-actively to support ourselves and others to be mentally healthy at work – PREVENTION
      * Describe a range of tools and supports to aid EARLY INTERVENTION
      * SUPPORT ourselves and others to stay well

Other learning and development activities that can be booked through Organisational Development include:

* + - * Mindfulness Awareness
      * Personal Resilience
      * Supporting Attendance at Work (e-learning for managers)

For all course bookings and dates available please use the link: <https://learning.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/>

**3.5.1B.E.S.T. Practice**

Employees may experience undue pressure at work if they have not been adequately trained for the job they do. The identification of all training needs is therefore critical and managers and supervisors should make full use of B.E.S.T. Practice and training matrices, to identify training gaps and plan future training requirements, in order to equip employees with the necessary skills and competences to carry out their role.

**3.6 Occupational Health Support and Employee Counselling Services**

The Council’s Occupational Health Service and contracted Employee Counselling Service offers confidential support services to employees who are experiencing or have been absent from work as a result of stress related illness.

The Occupational Health Service, together with Human Resources, can also advise on reasonable workplace adjustments which may help to facilitate a return to work, including signposting employees to relevant support agencies, wherever appropriate.

Employees can self-refer to Occupational Health or Employee Counselling Services by contacting the numbers provided below.

**3.7 Employees**

Where an employee feels they are experiencing stress related symptoms they should at the earliest opportunity, speak to their line manager.

In circumstances where an employee feels unable to approach their line manager, they should raise their concerns with another Manager, Human Resources or their Trade Union representative.

Where stress risk assessments are carried out, employees must co-operate with the implementation of any agreed action plans resulting from the completed risk assessment in order to help to reduce the risk of work-related stress.

# 4. STRESS MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

**4.1 Introduction**

Under Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, there is a legal duty to carry out assessments of the significant risks in the workplace which could affect employees. This requirement extends to carrying out a risk assessment where there is an identifiable risk of work related stress.

In 2004 the HSE introduced the Stress Management Standards, the aim of which was to provide guidance in order to simplify the risk assessment process when tackling the issues surrounding work related stress.

As defined in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) management Standards, there are six potential causes of work related stress, which are:

* 1. The **demands** placed on individuals at work, such as the size of their workload, work patterns and the working environment.
  2. The degree of **control** individuals are allowed in the way they carry out their work on a day to day basis.
  3. The level of **support** individuals are offered, for example the provision of adequate resources and support from line managers and colleagues.
  4. The nature of **relationships** within the workplace i.e. where there is conflict or poor interpersonal relationships.
  5. How people understand their **role** in the workplace and whether there are conflicting roles.
  6. How **change** within the organisation is managed and communicated.

**4.2 Informal interventions**

Whilst risk assessments may be required to identify possible sources of stress within the workplace, managers should wherever possible seek to reduce the likelihood of stress through positive management behaviour and proactive people and performance management. In particular, managers should encourage open communication with employees through the following processes:

* + - One to one discussions with employees
    - Regular team meetings where negative pressures, workloads etc. are openly discussed and possible interventions explored
    - Regular JCC meetings involving Trade Union representatives
    - Adopting an “open door” policy where employees feel enabled to approach their manager to discuss any issues they may be experiencing
    - Annual B.E.S.T. Practice.

By seeking to address the possible sources of stress through adopting an open and transparent communication process with employees, it is likely that managers will be able to address any issues at source before they have the opportunity to develop to a point employee health and wellbeing is adversely affected.

**4.3 Early intervention**

In accordance with the Trust’s Supporting Attendance Policy, line Managers must complete the Early Intervention Notification (EIN) form for all cases related to stress, immediately after an employee calls to report their absence. The form should then be forwarded to Human Resources for processing.

As well as completing the EIN form process outlined above, in cases of absence due to **work related stress**, managers must also ensure that the following actions are taken when they are notified that an employee is absent:

* + - The relevant Development Manager must be notified
    - A stress risk assessment must be carried out.

All instances of stress related absence will be monitored by the Executive Management Team and Managers to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to address each case.

**4.4 Stress Risk Assessment for individuals or small teams**

It is recognised that even with informal interventions in place, there will still be circumstances where individuals or small teams of employees are experiencing work related stress or displaying symptoms of work related stress. Where this is identified, the most appropriate course of action would be to carry out an individual/small team stress risk assessment.

Examples of when a stress risk assessment would be required, includes but is not exhaustive:

* + - Employee(s) displaying common signs and symptoms of stress
    - Employee(s) advising management that they are experiencing stress
    - Increased levels of employee absence attributed to stress

The risk assessment should be carried out by the line manager together with the employee(s). If for any reason the employee(s) do not wish for their line manager to carry out the assessment, it can be facilitated by another manager.

The employee(s) should be given the opportunity to pre-populate the assessment before meeting with the manager. There is no requirement to fill out each section of the form, only the parts which are applicable need to be completed.

Once the meeting had taken place and the assessment carried out, suitable actions must be agreed and recorded. Actions may include:

* + - Reasonable adjustments to work duties
    - Enhanced manager/colleague support
    - Additional training
    - Occupational health referral
    - Referral to counselling

Once the actions have been agreed with the employee(s), the outcome of the stress risk assessment should be recorded and confirmed to the employee(s) involved. A copy of the completed stress risk assessment should be sent to Human Resources.

The risk assessment should be reviewed within three months from the date of the assessment**. The stress risk assessment is included as Appendix 1.**

**Note: The assessment pro-forma, which references the HSE’s 6 stress categories, is designed to be used as a guide and is not intended to be used as a question set checklist. Please refer to the user’s guidance at the front of the form for full instructions.**

**When carrying out the assessment, managers are urged to speak openly with the individual or staff group about where they see the main stressors in the workplace, and what they feel would help alleviate those areas of concern.**

**5. FURTHER INFORMATION**

**For further information and guidance about stress management contact:**

**Human Resources Service (Employee Relations)**

01563 576832 or [HumanResources@east-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:HumanResources@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

## **Health and Safety at the Helpdesk**

01563 554825 or [HealthandSafety@east-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:HealthandSafety@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

## **Human Resources (Organisational Development)**

01563 576360 or [OrganisationalDevelopment@east-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:OrganisationalDevelopment@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

## **Occupational Health Service**

01563 576741 or [OccupationalHealth@east-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:OccupationalHealth@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)

## **Employee Counselling Services**

PAM OH Solutions on 0141 428 3900

Further useful information about work related stress, including the Stress Management Standards, campaigns and case studies can be found at Health and Safety Executive (HSE) <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/>

ACAS Working for Everyone – Supporting Mental Health at Work

[Mental health in the workplace | Acas](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1900)

**Stress Risk Assessment For Individuals/Small Teams**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Service/ work area** |  | **Date of assessment** |  |
| **Name of individual(s)/ Group** |  | **Name of assessor** |  |

## **Guidance Notes**

It should be remembered that what is a source of stress for one person may not be a source of stress for another and at different times people may feel that they are struggling to cope with the pressures of work. Personal circumstances outside of work can often contribute towards these feelings and it’s important to regularly discuss any issues people may be having so that they can be addressed in a proactive and practical way. Managers should therefore always aim to encourage open communication and have regular conversations with their team.

This stress risk assessment template can be used for individuals or small groups of employees where sources of work related stress have been identified. However, it should be noted **that there is no requirement to use this template** and those facilitating a meeting about work related stress, can opt to use a more informal approach. The most important aspect of the process is to determine what the issues are by having an open and honest conversation with the individual(s) concerned. Regardless of the way the meeting is conducted, the outcome and actions must still be agreed and recorded.

**Where the stress risk assessment template is used, it is recommended that individual(s) are issued with a copy in advance of the meeting and asked to prepopulate it prior to attending. This allows for a more constructive discussion and better preparation of responses and/or actions during the meeting.**

The meeting will normally be facilitated by the individual(s) line manager. If however, for any reason the employee(s) do not wish for their line manager to do this, it can be facilitated by another manager or by a representative from Human Resources or Health and Safety.

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| --- | --- |
| **Potential cause of Stress**  **1. Demands**  This includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment. | **Comments/ Discussion points**  ***Please record your own thoughts and feelings in the boxes below. This will be discussed during the assessment meeting.***  **Note: *the questions in each section are provided to act as a guide only. There is no requirement to answer each section if they do not apply to your particular circumstances. Sections can be left blank or marked not applicable if they are not a cause of work related stress.*** |
| Points you may wish to discuss here may include:   * The demands of the job * Achieving deadlines and completing tasks * The pace of the work you do and * Work/life balance (breaks, hours of work, smarter working etc.) |  |

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| **2. Control**  How much say the person has in the way they do their work. | **Comments/ Discussion points** |
| The discussion here should focus on how empowered you feel in your work.  For example you may wish to think about:   * How much autonomy you have over the way you do your work * If you feel empowered to make your own decisions * If there is some flexibility in how your work day is organised * If there are opportunities to try new things in your role and to implement better ways of doing things |  |

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| **3. Support**  This includes the encouragement and resources provided by management and colleagues. | **Comments/ Discussion points** |
| The discussion here is about the support you are given and points you may wish to discuss include:   * Whether you are given enough performance feedback from your line manager * How approachable you find your line manager and others within the management team. * Whether you can rely on colleagues to help you with a work related problem * If you are supported through emotionally demanding situations at work * What happens when mistakes are made |  |

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| **4. Relationships**  This includes promoting positive working, avoiding conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. | **Comments/ Discussion points** |
| Discussion should focus on the relationships and behaviours within the workplace and points may include:   * How colleagues listen, notice, respond and engage with each other * If relationships are strained or if there is friction or anger between colleagues/ managers * If you are you subject to unkind words or behaviour at work * Whether you get the respect you deserve from others |  |

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| **5. Role**  Understanding your role within your section/ the Council and whether you have conflicting roles | **Comments/ Discussion Points** |
| Consider your own role and whether you are clear about what is expected of you at work. Points for discussion may include:   * Whether you are clear about what your duties and responsibilities are * The goals and objectives of your team/ section * The direction and information you are provided with to do your job effectively * Your understanding of how your works fits into the overall aims of the Council |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **6. Change**  How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in your section and overall within the organisation. | **Comments/ Discussion Points** |
| How organisational change is managed and communicated in the workplace. Points for discussion may include:   * Being provided with enough opportunity to ask question about change * Feeling properly consulted about changes that impact on you * Understanding changes and how they will work out in practice. |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Other** | **Comments/ Discussion Points** |
| Are there any other areas of stress which you want to discuss, which have not been covered?  This may include personal issues out with the workplace which may be contributing to how you are coping with pressures at work |  |

**Action Plan**

**Actions must be: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART objectives).**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Stressor/ Area of concern** | **Agreed action (Management)** | **Agreed Action (Employee(s)** | **Review Date** |
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**Actions must be jointly agreed by both parties and reviewed within three month**