



## **Stress Management February 2019**

### **1 Definition**

Stress can be defined as the condition that produces a mental, physical and behavioural response in a period where he or she feels unable to cope with the demands imposed upon them, which may lead eventually to incapability and illness.

### **2 Statement of Commitment**

2.1 Stirchley and Brookside Parish Council recognise that stress is a health issue.

2.2 The council as a caring employer will assess the risks to health from work related stress and where reasonable practicable control this wherever effective means to do so can be identified.

2.3 The Council will also provide support to those suffering from stress related illness, whatever the cause, to help employees to return to full health and productivity.

### **3 General Causes**

3.1 Modern society has many well known causes of stress and many jobs undertaken by Stirchley and Brookside Parish Council employees are inherently difficult and demanding. The process of monitoring performance can also be stressful but is essential to the efficient provision of Council services. Whether someone is made ill as the result of the stress they are under depends very much on how much control they perceive that they have over the situation that they find themselves in. It also depends on how long the stress continues, how severe it is and whether someone is under stress from several sources at once.

3.2 In the course of a lifetime there are inevitable stressful events such as the death of a loved one, change of job or house, money worries, relationship difficulties etc. Obviously all these cannot be controlled by Stirchley and Brookside Parish Council. The effects, however, can spill over into people's working lives; which is where the support offered by the Council can help.

3.3 Similarly work related stress can impact on an employee's personal relationships and family life, if these relationships suffer long term damage as a result there may be a consequent knock-on effect on work performance.

3.4 In modern organisations just one person being off sick increases the pressures on everyone else in the team who are trying to cope with an increased work-load as a result. If the absence is a long one, which is often the case with stress related illness, then these pressures can be enormous and can cause stress in others.

- 3.5 There are well-known work related stressors some of which occur from time to time and in various locations at Stirchley and Brookside Parish Council. These include:
- Uncertainty about expectations, objectives, job security of career prospects
  - Inflexible and over demanding work schedules or additional unscheduled work
  - Prolonged conflict between individuals
  - Lack of leadership and understanding from managers
  - Poor communication
  - Poor working environments or equipment

#### **4 Symptoms**

- 4.1 One of the first steps in managing stress is being able to recognise it either in your-self or others.
- 4.2 The key things to watch out for are changes in behaviour that continue for more than a few days such as:

##### **In the Individual**

- Mood changes
- Irritability
- Aggressiveness
- Poor memory and concentration
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Panic attacks and anxiety
- Increased alcohol or tobacco consumption

##### **In their work**

- Increased sickness absences (especially short frequent absences)
- Loss of motivation and commitment
- Erratic or poor timekeeping
- Working longer hours but to little effect
- Reduced work out put
- Increased errors
- Poor decision making
- Deteriorating planning and control
- Tension and conflict with others
- Increase in discipline problems

#### **5 Health Effects**

- 5.1 Stress has real physical effects such as:
- Headaches
  - Aching neck and shoulders
  - Raised blood pressure
  - Digestive problems
  - Dizziness
  - Blurred vision
  - Lowered resistance to infection

5.2 Most of these effects are short lived and cause no lasting harm. When the pressure is removed there is a quick return to normal. If, however, pressures are intense and continue for some time, the effects of stress are more sustained and can lead to longer term physical and mental health problems such as:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Ulcers
- Thyroid disorders

## 6 **Employees Responsibilities**

As employees we all have a legal duty to care for our own and each other's health and safety at work. We can do this by:

- Understanding and recognising the signs of stress in ourselves and others
- Taking up any training available and putting it into practice
- Being sensitive and supportive to our colleagues
- Taking personal responsibility in managing our own stress (e.g. taking regular exercise, using leave entitlement, ensuring that we actively include positive interludes in what might otherwise be a negative day, making use of the support available at an early stage etc.)
- Not being the cause of other's stress

## 7 **The Council's Responsibilities**

7.1 Employers have responsibilities to prevent and manage stress. Stress management has no 'secret' ingredient, it is basic good people management, treating everyone with respect and dignity, as a human being, in line with the Council's stated values.

7.2 It includes the following:

### **Assessment**

- Assess the risk of work related stress (use the questionnaire in the appendix if appropriate) and identify and implement measures that can be taken to control these risks.

### **The Work**

- Clarity and realism about objectives, workloads, targets and deadlines.
- Advance planning to take into account of periodic increases in work-load.
- Systematic approach to planning and time management.
- Improve the work environment and equipment where possible.
- Practical job design giving employees as much control as possible over the way they work.

### **Development**

- Manage resources to facilitate appropriate training and development, to include training on dealing with stress. Allow time to implement the skills acquired.
- Regular supervision / staff development sessions at which work place stressors are discussed to allow timely and suitable support to be provided. It would be appropriate to use the work related stress audit to focus attention on specific issues.

### **Communication**

- Ensure good communication, use team meetings to problem solve.
- Effective management of change, closely involving employees at every stage.
- Give prompt, positive feedback, recognise and reward good performance even if it is only by means of a 'thank you'. Celebrate success and promote fun.

### **Management of Stressed Employees**

- Action must be taken promptly but sensitively once it is known that an employee is suffering from stress. Problems left un-tackled escalate.
- If any employee reports work related stress problems take action to resolve the problem as far as is reasonable practical. Document action taken.
- Supportive non-judgmental attitude to employees suffering or recovering from stress.
- Flexibility and sensitivity in arranging a realistic, structured return to work rehabilitation plan for employees recovering from stress.
- Take all reasonable steps so that any employee returning to work after absence due to work related stress is not exposed to the same levels or nature of stress that caused the illness.

## **8 Support Available**

- 8.1 Stress is not a sign of weakness. Confidential support is available to any employee suffering from stress.
- 8.2 In the first instance, if the employee feels able to, the problems they are having should be discussed with their manager, and suitable support identified (e.g. change in work arrangements, counselling).

## **9 Managing return to work**

- 9.1 It is vital that an employee's return to work after a work related stress absence is managed effectively. There have been a number of high profile legal cases recently resulting in large compensation payments being made to employees who have suffered ill health as a result of work related stress then return to the same situation that caused the problem in the first place.
- 9.2 Identifying the particular aspects of the work situation that have caused the stress is the first step and needs to be done in conjunction with the employee, personnel officer, manager and occupational health.
- 9.3 Once the causes of stress have been identified actions can be taken to reduce or avoid these. Various options may need to be considered.
- Change in working hours or patterns
  - Improved communication and support
  - Change in workload or nature
  - Redeployment
- 9.4 Whatever is decided upon needs to be looked at in the context of the whole team to ensure that it is equitable and not just going to cause stress to others.
- 9.5 Returning to full health and productivity can be a lengthy process and a phased return to work may be needed with regular reviews of the progress being made.
- 9.6 Once an employee is identified as suffering from work related stress it is important that records are kept of the actions taken.

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