EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELL-BEING

GUIDANCE

May 2016

EMPLOYEE MENTAL WELL-BEING GUIDANCE

(Covers ALL council employees)

CONTENTS

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 This guidance supports the implementation of the council's [Policy on Employee Mental Well-Being](). The guidance focusses on preventing and managing stress in the workplace in accordance with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards. It also provides managers with information on how to support employees at work who are experiencing the effects of stress and mental well-being issues.

1.2 The Guidance also signposts support available to employees and managers both within and out with the council.

2. IDENTIFYING SYMPTOMS

2.1 The examples highlighted below are typically issues that are likely to trigger work related and non- work related stress. All employees, in particular managers should be aware of the potentially damaging impact of those issues on morale and mental wellbeing.

Work Related	Non Work Related
• New role • New manager • Relationship conflicts • Organisational Change • Deadlines • Performance Assessment • Workload • Making mistakes • Lack of confidence	• Exams • New job/starting work • Moving house • New baby • Relationship breakdown • Caring for an ill dependant/relative • Bereavement • Financial worries

2.2 Some common psychological and physical symptoms of stress to look out for are highlighted below;

Psychological Symptoms of Stress	Physical Symptoms of Stress
• Irritability or anger • Apathy or depression • Anxiety • Irrational behaviour • Loss of appetite • Comfort eating • Poor concentration • Alcohol and Substance misuse	• Excessive tiredness • Skin problems, such as eczema • Aches and pains resulting from tense muscles, including neck ache, backache and tension headaches • Increased pain from arthritis and other conditions • Heart palpitations • Nausea • Stomach problems

2.3 Managers should be alert to behavioural patterns that may indicate that an employee is not coping with work load such as regularly working through meal breaks, working excessively long hours or regularly taking work home. Regular one to one meetings provide the opportunity for managers to address these matters and for the employee to share any concerns/issues regarding workload.

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2.4 Management and performance information such as sickness absence data, staff turnover, violent incident reports, and the incidence of grievances, disciplinary cases and bullying & harassment cases can also provide helpful indicators to managers in identifying morale issues and sources of stress within their teams.

3. HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT STRESS IN MY TEAM?

3.1 Implementing the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) management standards through the actions set out under the 6 key risk areas identified by the HSE below can go some way to reducing the risk of stress on team members;

Demands

- Ensure that there are sufficient resources (people with appropriate skills, and equipment) to do the work allocated.

- Check with employees about any other unplanned work demands being placed upon them from other sources (eg. matrix management arrangements can be a source of stress for individuals if there is poor communication between the managers responsible for setting work tasks).

- Support employees by helping them to prioritise or renegotiate deadlines.

- Arrange cover for workloads during absences.

- Adjust working patterns to cope with peaks (employees should be consulted on the adjustments).

- Train employees appropriately so that they are able to do their jobs.

- If employees have spare capacity, consider giving them more responsibility at an appropriate level subject to providing the necessary training.

- Ensure that the work environment is appropriately designed and laid out to ensure that employees are able to do their jobs efficiently and without causing harm to themselves or others.

- Ensure that corporate and local health and safety policies are adhered to and that risks to health and safety of employees are identified and controlled.

- Encourage employees to take their annual leave entitlement and meal breaks.

Control

- Consult employees on decisions that affect their jobs.

- Where appropriate, give more control to employees by enabling them to plan their own work and to make decisions about how the work should be completed and how problems should be tackled.

- Respond favourably to requests for flexible working arrangements where possible to enable employees to cope with domestic commitments.

- Make allowances for cultural or faith considerations where possible (eg provision of a quiet space or prayer room).

4

- Enrich jobs by ensuring that employees are able to use a variety of skills.

- Allocate responsibility to teams to take projects forward.

- Avoid micro – management and over scrutiny of employee outputs unless underperformance has been identified.

- Where possible, introduce task variety and/or job rotation to minimise boredom and staleness.

Relationships

- Promote a culture in which members of the team trust each other and feel that they are fairly treated.

- Encourage employees to recognise the individual contributions of other team members and the benefits of the whole team pulling together.

- Select or build teams that have the right blend of expertise and experience.

- Ensure employees are aware of how to report unacceptable behaviour and the processes for resolving conflict at work.

- Direct employees where appropriate to available training to help them to deal with and defuse difficult situations.

- Celebrate team/individual successes

Change

- Where organisation change is planned, follow the appropriate Workforce Management processes setting out clearly the aims of the proposed change and the reasons why it is necessary.

- Explain the timetable for implementing the change including the plans for employee consultation. Explain what the change will mean in terms of day-to-day activity, and discuss whether there are any new training needs that will arise.

- Allow employees to talk about their concerns or any suggestions that they have for improving the way in which the change is to be managed.

- Involve employees in discussions about how their jobs might be developed and changed.

- Ensure that support is provided for employees who are affected by change.

- Following implementation of the change, ensure that employees understand their new roles and what is expected of them.

Role

- Ensure that employees have a clearly defined role supported by a personal work plan to enable them to fully understand their responsibilities and accountabilities.

- Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks, and review them periodically.

- Hold monthly team meetings to enable team members to clarify their role and discuss any possible role conflict.

- Ensure that employees understand how their work is related to the wider aims of the council.

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure that employees are clear about their role and are aware of what is planned over the coming months.

- Ensure that new members of staff receive a comprehensive induction. Corporate induction should be supplemented with a service specific induction.

- Encourage employees to ask for clarity at early stage if they are not clear about their priorities or the nature of the task to be undertaken.

Support

- Encourage employees to share concerns with their line manager, human resources, occupational health, or their trade union representative.

- Implement the Appraisal Development Review (ADR) process and have regular one-to-one meetings to discuss progress against individual work plans.

- Support and encourage employees to learn from mistakes rather than automatically treating them as performance/disciplinary matters.

- Develop positive leadership by listening to employees and taking on board their suggestions and concerns.

- Consider the support the council could offer a member of the team who is experiencing problems outside of work (eg. access to occupational health, trained counsellors, external support agencies)

4. MANAGING EMPLOYEES WITH MENTAL WELLBEING/STRESS ISSUES

Early Intervention

4.1 When an employee raises mental health/stress concerns or the manager recognises the symptoms in an employee, an early meeting with the employee concerned will provide the opportunity to discuss how he/she might be supported in the workplace. Early action can help prevent further deterioration in the employee's condition and if appropriate support can be provided, this may avoid the employee having to take time off work.

4.2 Discussion can be in the context of a regular one-to-one meeting or at a specifically arranged meeting. Alternatively the employee should be given the option to discuss the matter with a Human Resources Adviser or an Occupational Health Adviser if they would feel more comfortable.

4.3 Broaching the subject of mental health/stress with an employee can be difficult for both

manager and employee alike and given the sensitivity involved, the manager needs to clearly adopt a tactful and measured approach.   The use of 'open questions' will be helpful in encouraging the employee to open up and share his/her concerns. Managers who are inexperienced in dealing with such matters are recommended to attend the 'Mentally Healthy Workplace' training provided by the HR Learning & Development Unit. This training provides practical guidance in relation to holding 'difficult or sensitive conversations' and in the use of other relevant techniques.

4.4   Managers should take advantage of the council's Occupational Health early intervention service by seeking advice as to whether medical referral would be appropriate at this stage.

Absence

4.5   The first indication that an employee may be suffering stress may come only at the point that the employee reports their absence from work with stress. In these circumstances it is important to gather as much detail as possible at that first point of contact concerning the specific reasons for their absence.

4.6   An offer should be made to meet with the employee at the earliest opportunity to obtain as much information as possible in order to identify ways in which the employee can be supported back to work, particularly where the reason for the absence is work-related. The meeting need not be with the employee's line manager if they would be more comfortable speaking to a third party such Human Resources or a member of the Council's Occupational Health Advisory staff.

4.7   Where an employee is amenable to meet, it need not be at the employee's workplace and could be arranged instead at their home (subject to their consent), at another council building or some other mutually agreed venue.

4.8   The key objective is to identify the issues that are giving rise to the employee's stress as quickly as possible so that an appropriate support plan can be put in place to remove or minimise the causes and enable the employee to return to work. It is essential that an agreed channel of communication is put in place so that the employee does not become isolated and disenfranchised from the workplace making a return to work a more difficult proposition as time goes on.

Meeting with an employee

4.9   The substance of the discussion with an employee who has raised issues about their mental well-being and/or is absent from work as a result of stress will depend on the individual circumstances. However the employee should be encouraged to share as much information as possible so that any support measures can be tailored specifically to their needs.

4.10   During such discussions, care must be taken not to go beyond the scope of gathering information to support employees. Specific diagnosis and treatment of stress and other mental ill health is within the remit of qualified clinicians.

4.11   The following checklist provides a guide as to the typical areas to probe and aspects to consider when meeting with the employee. The extent to which the employee is prepared to disclose personal and/or medical information is wholly at their discretion. However, employees should be reassured that any information they are willing to provide will be used for the purpose of supporting them at work or to return to work and that strict confidentiality will be observed.

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- Ask open questions to gauge how they are feeling and the impact that it is having on their work/personal life

- Find out how long the employee has felt like this. Is it an ongoing issue or is it something that has just arisen?

- Identify whether the problem is work related or otherwise. Ask if there are any problems outside of work that they want to talk about or it would be helpful for you to know about.

- Find out whether they have been to their GP to discuss the matter.

- If they are happy to share the information, enquire as to the medical advice/treatment they have been given. If the employee has not sought medical advice suggest that they consider doing so.

- Ask the employee what they think would help to alleviate the situation.

- Ask the employee about any adjustments at work or any other support they feel that would help to resolve the situation and/or return to work.

- If the employee is absent on sick leave, find out when they think they will be fit to return to work and of any barriers that might be preventing their return.

- Ensure the employee is aware of possible sources of support including: confidential counselling, drug/alcohol services, financial advice, stress resilience training.

- Reassure the employee that the meeting is confidential and establish the extent to which the employee would wish their colleagues to be told, if anything, and by whom.

Remedial Measures

4.12 Where evidence suggests that an employee's stress could potentially be linked to factors in the workplace, those factors must be investigated and addressed. Where an employee has gone off sick with work related stress, reasonable adjustments should be made wherever possible so that an employee is not reintroduced into the same working conditions that are linked with their absence

4.13 A support plan should be prepared that is based on the outcome of discussions with the employee. This should include details of the actions the employee will take to improve the situation or to get fit to return to work together with the measures that the council has agreed to put in place including details of any reasonable adjustments. A copy of the support plan should be given to the employee.

4.14 Thereafter, regular review meetings should be held with the employee to discuss progress in meeting the objectives of the support plan including any other support measures that may still be required. Review meetings should be held as frequently and for as long as required and must continue beyond the return to work where an employee has been absent due to stress/employee wellbeing issues.

4.15 Given that working arrangements and personal circumstances are subject to change, it is important to maintain an open dialogue with the employee so that they are able to discuss issues with you as they arise rather than allowing them to build up and

become overwhelming. The employee should not feel that through a lack of support and communication, they have no alternative but to be absent from the workplace.

5. SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES WHO ARE SUFFERING THE EFFECTS OF STRESS OR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

5.1   Employees who are suffering the effects of stress or mental health problems should be encouraged to discuss the matter with their manager at the earliest opportunity in order that the most appropriate means of help can be identified and offered.

5.2   Employees should be made aware that they can alternatively discuss any concerns with Human Resources. Additionally the employee may wish to seek advice from a Trade Union representative, and if appropriate, seek a medical view from their GP. Where appropriate the employee may be referred to Occupational Health for specialist advice and support.

5.3   The council offers free access to a qualified counsellor. This confidential service is available to all employees and includes support for non-work related problems. A self-referral form for the counselling service can be accessed at here.

5.4   The council's Learning and Development Team also provides training interventions that helps participants to understand the causes of stress and the types of tools and coping strategies for dealing with the effects of stress. Information on training interventions available can be found at here.

5.5   Where appropriate, employees may be referred for Stress Control Classes provided by Lothian NHS. Further information can be found here.

5.6   Further specialist advice from dedicated professionals within the council can be accessed as follows:

Human Resources	01506 282222
Health & Safety	01506 281414
Drug and Alcohol Service	01506 430225
Domestic and Sexual Assault Team	01506 281055
Advice Shop (Welfare Rights, Debt, Benefits, Energy Advice)	01506 283000
Cancer Support MacmillanWestLothian@westlothian.gov.uk	01506 283053