



BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL

STRESS AT WORK POLICY FOR SCHOOLS

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Date:
Review Date:

Date Published	September 2012
Version	V4
Review Date	September 2019

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STRESS AT WORK POLICY FRAMEWORK CODE OF PRACTICE FOR SCHOOLS

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Bracknell Forest Council and the Governing Board have a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees whilst they are at work. Undue stress can adversely affect employees' health and well being and, as such, it is the Governing Boards's responsibility to take reasonably practicable steps to avoid and reduce unnecessary workplace stress.

2 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The aim of the policy is to outline the Governing Board's responsibilities towards its staff and to identify ways of managing stress by:

- identifying causes of stress
- taking action to reduce staff stress
- managing the working environment

- 2.2 This Policy is mainly concerned with stress arising from or affecting the individual in the working environment. It does, however recognise that causes of stress may be external to the workplace or be combined with causes within the work place. Often, no single cause may be identified, but where the individual is affected at work, the Governing Board will take the approach of helping the employee whatever the cause of their stress.

- 2.3 The Governing Board acknowledges that any employee could experience stress, that no weakness is implied by this and that it will encourage employees to seek help and support. The ways in which assistance can be offered will naturally vary in different working environments and therefore the guidance outlined in this policy is not prescriptive. The paragraphs which follow indicate some of the measures which may be considered.

- 2.4 The Governing Board has a range of policies, such as the Capability and Disciplinary Procedures, Fair Treatment at Work and Managing Sickness Absence, which deal with issues of poor work performance and attitude. Managers should not be deterred from using these policies when all reasonable efforts to assist an employee suffering from stress have proved unsuccessful. This policy should, therefore, be read in conjunction with other relevant policies where necessary.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1 This policy applies to all staff employed in schools in Bracknell Forest including temporary workers but excluding those employed on a casual basis.

4 DEFINITION

- 4.1 The Health and Safety Executive has defined stress as “the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them”.

Some levels of pressure, even when high, can be motivating and provide a challenge. However, pressures at a level which the individual is unable to cope with, could result in stress. Stress is not the preserve of busy or high powered jobs; employees in routine jobs may suffer from stress which may also result from an employee feeling that they have no real control over their work situation.

5 CAUSES OF STRESS

- 5.1 It is recognised that different things can trigger stress in individuals at various times in their working life and that people react differently to stressful situations. It is therefore important to recognise that some factors may cause stress for one person, but not for another.

- 5.2 The following can be sources of stress arising from work:

- Anxiety about fear of change
- Coping with rapid change
- Unclear role definition
- Conflicting priorities
- Too much work or work not matched to the individual’s skills and competence
- Not being able to use skills, or insufficient work
- Lack of job security
- Crisis management – no long term planning
- Lack of involvement – isolation, either physical or emotional
- Poor work relationships
- Lack of communication
- Harassment or bullying

- 5.3 Stress can also arise from the pressures people experience in their home and personal lives e.g. bereavement, relationship or family problems, financial difficulties; these factors can make people more vulnerable to stress at work. Often the harmful effects of stress are caused by a combination of work and home circumstances.

6 IDENTIFYING AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER STRESS

- 6.1 Identifying stress is a complex issue. An individual may display one or more of the following indicators at any one time, but this may not mean that they are suffering from the negative effects of stress. It is often when the stressors persist over a period of time that the signs of negative stress become more acute.

- Persistent or recurrent moods such as - anger, irritability, depression
- Physical symptoms – general nonspecific aches and pains, raised heart rate, dizziness, blurred vision, skin or sleep disorders.
- Changed behaviours – difficulty concentrating or remembering things, unable to “switch off”, loss of creativity, making errors, double checking everything, eating disorders, increasing use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs.
- High/increased levels of sickness absence – particularly frequent short term absences.

- Poor relationships at work – conflict with colleagues, poor relationships with clients.
- Poor work performance – lack of concentration, less output, lower quality work, poor decision making.
- Attitude and behaviour – low morale, loss of motivation, poor time keeping, working longer hours but with diminishing effectiveness.
- When stress is experienced over long periods other signs can develop, for example high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, long term depression.

6.2 It is important to note that if an employee says they are under stress, the manager should take time to listen and be supportive – a dismissive response may not help, and the individual may be deterred from approaching the manager again.

7 RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 The Governing Board has a duty to take all reasonable steps to protect employees against the potentially harmful effects of stress, although no employer can guarantee its employees a stress free existence. All employees and managers have a responsibility for recognising and taking steps to reduce or eliminate stress and the causes of stress in the workplace.

7.2 Individuals

- Will need to recognise the early signs of stress in themselves and others.
- Will need to be supportive of colleagues who are experiencing the negative effects of stress. This may mean giving practical assistance or moral support or both, but will always involve listening.
- Should initially discuss those issues with their manager which may contribute to stress. If there is no improvement, they may wish to discuss the situation with a member of the HR Team or use the Staff Support Service (if applicable – not all schools are part of this contract please check with your school). School staff can contact the Education Support Partnership:

<https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/>

- Identify and recognise their training and development needs and take responsibility for their own well-being and development within the job. Every employee should be able to discuss the need for more training or coaching, or the amount and prioritisation of workload. This need not just be within the context of the Performance Management arrangements but should take place at any time if the employee has an issue which they wish to discuss.

7.3 Supervisors/Managers/Headteachers

Managers need to be aware of and responsive to work pressures and the effects which they might have on employees. Managers should ensure that:

- All new starters are properly inducted and all employees receive appropriate 'on and off the job' training to ensure that they have the confidence in their ability to carry out their job.

- Adequate risk assessments have been carried out (taking into account factors which may cause stress) and appropriate actions are taken.
- There is good communication with staff, and a supportive environment is fostered within which stress issues can be discussed.
- Staff involvement is encouraged, for example attending team meetings where ideas, problems and solutions can be discussed.
- Staff are trained, coached and developed to ensure that they have the ability to carry out their existing or any new roles.
- Effective time management is encouraged, for example by monitoring working arrangements/hours, workloads, deadlines, overtime and ensuring use of holiday entitlements.
- They approach an employee if they are aware that they are showing signs of stress (see paragraph 6).
- Job descriptions should be considered periodically (for example at annual appraisals) to ensure the job's objective's are compatible and achievable.
- Annual Performance Management arrangements are carried out in line with requirements, as this provides an opportunity for work loads, deadlines and any training needs to be discussed on an individual basis with each employee.

7.4 External Support

The HR Team are available to provide specialist advice and support to Headteachers and managers on stress related issues including:

- Giving guidance on the use of this Policy and helping Headteachers managers and employees to find solutions to stress related problems.
- Providing support and advice in planning the return to work of employees who have suffered from stress related health problems, in conjunction with Occupational Health advice
- Giving advice on ongoing training and development needs.
- Advising on training courses on stress related issues.
- Providing ongoing support for changes to the working environment.
- Ensuring that Headteachers, managers and staff are aware of the Staff Support Service which the Council provides and encouraging referral to the Service as appropriate (please note not all schools are part of this contract please speak to your headteacher). School staff can contact the Education Support Partnership:

<https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/>

7.5 Occupational Health

All employees have a pre-employment health screening prior to the commencement of their employment with the Council. This is to ensure that

the employee is both physically and mentally fit for the work which they will be doing, and to ensure the Council is able to deal with any future difficulties which may arise.

Any employee who may be suffering from a stress related complaint may be referred to the Occupational Health service where an assessment will be made on the impact of the complaint on their work. Management advice will be given on work related issues eg their prospects for a return to work, timescales involved and any further relevant guidance. A return to work plan may be constructed which will include issues such as a graduated return, suggested nature of changes to duties etc.

8 STRESS RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 Managers need to carry out risk assessments and as far as is reasonably practicable put appropriate and preventative measures into place. Risk assessments need to identify activities which may lead to stress or which may place a particular group of staff at risk through stress.

8.2 Managers undertaking risk assessments must ensure that they are fully trained and up to date on health and safety issues which might affect them and aware of the steps which they should take to guard against health risks.

9 WHAT TO DO WHEN STRESS BECOMES A PROBLEM

9.1 Strategies for dealing with work place stress are usually two-fold. As well as putting measures into place to deal with work issues which may be the cause of stress, it is also important to provide the individual with help to identify personal strategies for coping with stress.

The following measures are designed to find solutions to situations where work place stress has become, or has the potential to become, a problem for both the Governing Board and/or the individual.

9.2 Support To The Individual

- The individual who is under stress, needs to be able to talk about the problems they are encountering and should be encouraged to discuss what they think would be a good way to deal with the situation. It is important for their Headteacher/ manager to set aside some uninterrupted time to allow the individual to talk. All the suggestions may not be acceptable, but it is important to give them serious consideration. Often, giving the individual some ability to influence how they resolve their problem helps them to feel more valued and in control - this can help reduce stress levels.
- The individual should be offered assistance through the training opportunities which help staff and managers cope with stress related issues and or the referral to Council's Staff Support Scheme (if applicable). Depending on the level of support required a referral to Occupational Health may also be appropriate.

The Headteacher/manager should not see this as a solution in itself they will need to monitor the situation to try to reduce stress where possible.

- When staff are absent from work, the Headteacher/Manager should follow the 'Managing Sickness Absence' Policy which includes a return to work

interview to establish the reason for absence. Return to work interviews can be used as a way of offering support and should not be confrontational. They can be an opportunity to explore both the impact of work situations on the individual and the impact of the individual's absence on work.

- If patterns of absence develop, or if periods of absence are for reasons of stress, then a referral to the Occupational Health Service should be considered. Guidance on how to do this can be found in the Managing Sickness Absence policy. In cases of stress and depression the Occupational Health Service will be able to advise on future appropriate management action.
- Stress related problems are rarely solved by a single action and often take some time to resolve. Even if practical measures have been taken to remove the underlying problems, it is important to continue talking with the individual to give them a chance to work out for themselves a way of resolving their difficulties and the timescale required to do it.

9.3 Practical Measures

- Practical steps might be taken to solve short-term work problems, for example extending a deadline or reallocating a proportion of work, but the manager must keep the situation under review. If there are underlying problems which are not addressed then the problem may resurface.
- There is little that can be done directly to resolve a problem which is generated by events outside of work. Even though maintaining a sympathetic attitude, there may be capability issues to investigate. The Capability and Disciplinary procedures must still be considered in sustained cases of below par performance or reduced output.
- The Headteacher/manager must consider whether staffing levels are correct, whether incompatible activities or conflicting priorities have been designed into the job, whether workload peaks are temporary or recurrent, etc. The individual who exhibits signs of stress may not be the only employee experiencing a problem if the situation has its basis in work organisation. Much may be done simply by reconsidering work allocation, deadlines, or delegation but it may be that more fundamental issues need to be examined.
- The Headteacher/manager must consider whether there is a capability problem. They will need to ascertain if the individual is properly trained in order to carry out their role effectively. It is also important that the individual's duties are defined properly and that they understand them. Steps should be taken to address these issues and, if a positive result is not achieved, the manager should consider whether there is a need to apply the Capability Procedure.
- Headteachers/Managers should remember that where stress results in long term absence, the policy on Managing Sickness Absence requires the involvement of the Occupational Health Service for a medical opinion (see paragraph 7.5). In severe cases, where the employee is unfit to return to their job, then options such as offering suitable alternative employment or retirement on ill-health grounds may need to be considered.
- The Headteacher/manager should consider whether interpersonal problems could be the cause of stress. Areas such as harassment and

bullying or personal issues between members of staff such that some individuals are failing to maintain a proper working relationship should be looked in to. If so, the Headteacher/manager should consider action under the Fair Treatment Policy or Disciplinary Procedure.

10 **CONCLUSION**

- 10.1 It is important to remember that stress affects individuals to varying degrees and in a variety of different ways. The above are only guidelines on how to deal with stress; and the HR Team is available to give more detailed advice and support in particular cases.
- 10.2 The Council and the Governing Board is committed to taking steps to reduce unnecessary work place stress. Headteachers and Managers are encouraged to deal sensitively with situations where employees are under stress, whilst taking whatever actions are necessary to assist the individual and to meet the needs of the service.