



# WALTHAM ABBEY TOWN COUNCIL

## Stress Management Policy

Date Adopted	Minute Reference	Review Date
06/2018		June 2020
19 <sup>th</sup> October 2022	212/22	October 2024
5 <sup>th</sup> June 2025	088/25	June 2027

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Waltham Abbey Town Council are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its officers and recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
- 1.2 This policy sets out the Council's aims and objectives for the management of health and safety in relation to stress at work.
- 1.3 The Council, as an employer, places a high value on maintaining a healthy and safe working environment for all its officers. The Council also recognises that this duty of care extends to mental health as well as physical health at work.
- 1.4 Mental health problems have many causes, including stresses in the workplace and in the life of the officers away from work. A controllable level of pressure can in some cases lead to improved motivation, job satisfaction and performance, but in contrast, excessive pressure can become harmful and result in stress.
- 1.5 This Council is committed to identifying sources of stress in the workplace and taking action to reduce harmful stress.
- 1.6 This policy has been produced in accordance with guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive relating to Stress at Work.
- 1.7 This policy applies to all officers of the Council. Managers are responsible for implementation.

## **2. DEFINITION OF STRESS**

- 2.1 Stress is the natural reaction that individuals have to excessive pressure. It occurs when perceived demands exceed the individual's ability to cope. It is not a disease but if excessive or prolonged can lead to mental and physical ill health.

The above statement makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

- 2.2 Every job brings its own pressures and demands; these are an unavoidable part of working life. Some pressure can be a good thing, keeping officers motivated and providing a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, people's ability to deal with pressure is not limitless. Excessive workplace pressure can cause stress, which may be harmful.

### **3. THE LEGAL POSITION**

- 3.1 There is no specific legislation relating to the management of stress, the requirement to do so falls under the general requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc ACT (HSWA) 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- 3.2 Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all officers.
- 3.3 Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employers have a duty to assess and control significant health and safety risks to which their officers are exposed at work. Which includes ensuring appropriate risk assessments are carried out.
- 3.4 Ill health resulting from stress caused at work has to be treated in the same way as ill health due to physical causes in the workplace. This means that employers do have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that the health of any officers is not put at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, or from the day-to-day demands placed on an individual.
- 3.5 Stress and feeling unable to cope can become a disability in severe cases if there is a long-term affect. Where this is the case, an individual's condition may satisfy the definition of disability within the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Council will be obliged to make reasonable adjustments.

### **4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY**

- 4.1 The aims and objectives of the Council's policy on managing stress at work are to:

Identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be reviewed annually.

Provide training for all managers and supervisory officers in good management practices.

Increase general awareness of stress and methods to prevent and combat harmful, excessive workplace stress through training initiatives for all officers.

Enable officers to recognise the signs of stress in themselves and others and to emphasise the importance of early interventions to tackle the problem.

Manage problems that do occur and provide confidential counselling for officers affected by stress caused by either work or external factors. Ensure that the Employee Assistance Programme is well advertised to officers.

Take action to combat and prevent workplace stressors.

Manage and support the return to work of those who have had stress related problems.

Monitor and evaluate stress indicators. Using Risk Assessments.

Provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the agreed stress management strategy.

## **5. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **5.1 Managers**

Conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments to eliminate stress or controls risks from stress.

Ensure good communication between management and officers, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.

Set clear priorities for officers.

Ensure officers are fully trained to discharge their duties.

Ensure officers are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.

Monitor workloads to ensure people are not overloaded.

Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that officers are not overworking.

Monitor holidays to ensure officers are taking their full entitlement.

Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated.

Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member or officer who is experiencing stress outside work e.g., bereavement or separation etc.

### **5.2 Officers**

To raise issues of concern with their line manager, human resources, or trade union representative.

Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended.

Training for all officers on sickness monitoring so that everyone is treated fairly and equally but also that everyone is aware of what the correct procedure is.

Increase their awareness of stress and methods to prevent and combat harmful, excessive workplace stress through participation in training initiatives organised by the Authority.

Take action to combat and prevent workplace stressors.

## **6. EARLY DETECTION OF STRESS (RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS)**

- 6.1 Anyone responsible for managing other officers has an important role to play in identifying potential symptoms of stress in others and should discuss workload and other stress related factors in appraisal sessions.
- 6.2 Better monitoring of sickness absences will assist in early detection.
- 6.3 Managers and supervisors must also check if work performance is impaired by stress so that problems can be resolved (e.g., by reviewing the person's duties) and are advised to consult the Occupational Health Service for advice. Managing risk is an important management responsibility and the benefits of early detection should not be underestimated.

## **7. STRESS PREVENTION**

- 7.1 The Council recognises that the most effective way of tackling harmful, excessive workplace stress is to prevent it at source as part of a coherent overall prevention policy, covering a range of issues. This includes a continuous review of employment policies, improving communication systems, redesigning jobs, and encouraging decision making and autonomy.
- 7.2 Early recognition of problems and encouragement of self-reporting before stress becomes harmful is important.
- 7.3 Precise prevention strategies will vary according to prevailing stressors. The Council will monitor and assess priorities through induction, appraisal, exit information, stress related sickness, officer turnover rates, grievances, complaints, etc.
- 7.4 A key factor in prevention is the development of a supportive organisational climate where stress is not perceived as a sign of weakness or incompetence. In order to create a supportive organisational climate, the Council will work to remove the stigma frequently attached to those adversely affected by stress and maximise the support available to officers. Managers and others in supervisory position have a crucial role in this respect.
- 7.5 There will be demonstrable commitment to the issue of stress and mental health at work from the Management Team. This will require a dismantling of cultural norms within the organisation, which inherently promote stress. One example would be in norms that encourage officers to work excessively long hours and feel guilty about leaving on time.

- 7.6 The traditional approach towards work related stress has been to focus on treating symptoms rather than causes. The Council will aim to change unhealthy cultures. Some of the ways in which the Council will achieve healthy and supportive networks/environments are:
- Council's endorsement of the policy and a regular review of the policy
  - To inform officers of the sources of support and advice within the council
  - Set clear priorities for all officers
  - Establish a risk management process by extending and improving the inter-personal skills of supervisors and managers so they convey a supportive attitude and are able to recognise the signs of stress and can more comfortably handle officers' problems
  - To develop mechanisms to advise and support individuals when the Council is embarking on major organisational change, during which either job changes or potential redundancies are a possibility
  - The continuation of officer development and training that already exists including various courses covering inter-personal skills and stress management workshops with the aim of developing individual stress management skills and the ability to monitor and manage stress levels in themselves, their teams and colleagues
  - Through health screening/health enhancement programmes the Council will support further initiatives that directly promote positive health behaviours in the workplace e.g.
    - Encouragement to use health and fitness strategies
    - Smoking cessation programmes
    - Advice on lifestyle management
    - Advice about alcohol consumption

## **8. MANAGEMENT OF HARMFUL STRESS**

- 8.1 Where the above preventive mechanisms fail, stress related conditions should be recognised as soon as possible. Facilities will be available for discussion, advice, and appropriate referral as necessary.
- 8.2 Most people who develop stress related conditions make a full recovery, often without interruption to working lives. If time off has been required, it can be far more costly to the organisation to retire a person early on medical grounds, re-recruit and train a successor than to spend time easing a person back to work.
- 8.3 The Council will provide mechanisms for support:
- Counselling and Welfare Support – The Council will provide welfare information and confidential support via the Occupational Health Service. Confidential and professional counselling services for any officers experiencing problems in their workplace can be sought via the Employee Assistance Programme.

- Facilitating a return to work programme for officers who have been absent from work as a result of stress, the return to work itself is likely to be a 'stressful' experience. Officers are encouraged to discuss their return to work with their immediate Supervisor. A manageable programme of work will be worked out with the individual and the Manager. If a referral to Occupational Health has not already been made, this would be an appropriate time so that fitness to return to work may be assessed and advice given on reasonable measures to be taken to avoid a recurrence of stress.

## **9. INDIVIDUAL ACTION AND UNACCEPTABLE STRESS**

9.1 Any officer who feels that they are at risk of unacceptable stress should follow the advice given below:

- It is important not to feel stressed to a point where it becomes intolerable. By taking action early, it is possible to minimise the harmful effects of stress
- It is important to speak (or if easier, to write) to your immediate supervisor as soon as possible. They may be unaware of the stress you feel you are under and may be able to make changes, which alleviate the situation
- Talk to a member of Management or ask an appointment to be arranged with the Occupational Health doctor/nurse or the Employee Assistance Programme
- Seek the advice and support of the Union
- If the informal approach above does not work for you, then you may wish to take advice about the Council's Grievance Procedure if the cause of the stress is work based

## **10. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY**

10.1 Waltham Abbey Town Council is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity in both service delivery and employment. Care has been taken in drafting this policy to ensure that the Council do not unjustifiably discriminate against any minority group. This policy supports the Council's Equality Policy.