

Report to: Functions Committee  
Date of Meeting: 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2007  
Report of: Head of Human Resources  
Title: Stress Management Guidelines

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**1. SUMMARY**

Stress is one of the most common causes of sickness absence in the council. During the calendar year 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2007, 23 employees were off on long term sickness absences caused by stress resulting in the loss of 10,686 hours lost time. Of these, 11 were directly triggered by situations at work, 6 had both work and personal issues and the remainder were linked to employees' personal lives. This phenomenon is not uncommon. In a recent Chartered Institute of People and Development survey on sickness absence stress was reported as the second most common cause of absence. In part, this reflects the multiple stressors in employees' lives. It is also a particularly marked phenomenon in organisations going through periods of change. The attached guidelines are designed to provide guidance to managers on handling work-related stress. It is designed to be accompanied by a training programme for managers which has been agreed as part of this year's corporate training plan. This year's corporate training plan incorporates training on sickness management and on identifying and handling stress with a view to preventing and minimising stress related absences.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

that the attached guidelines are approved.

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### 3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

#### 3.1 Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive define stress as “ the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them”.

Stress can lead both to psychological and physical illness. Interestingly an analysis of the work-related stress cases leading to long term absence where stress was defined as the reason were not caused by work-load stress but based on emotional reactions to challenging workplace situations which caused personal distress. The reasons were very varied. A small number were linked to re-structuring situations, others to being subject to serious disciplinary investigations or action, several to allegations of bullying, and others to strained work relationships for which there were differing causes. Employees suffering from workload stress tend to remain at work or take short-term absence often for a different presenting reason. Identifying stress and problem solving at the earliest possible stage, preferably before absences occur is the wisest approach. A clear need was identified for training on how to handle employees suffering from stress with an emphasis on developing the “softer management skills”.

3.2 The Stress Management Guidelines set out the differing roles of Corporate Management Board, line managers, Human Resources, Occupational Health and employees themselves in addressing the issue of stress. Corporate Management Board has a key role to play in supporting the initiatives to reduce stress-related absence by promoting the attendance of managers on appropriate training, ensuring managers carry out risk assessments, ensuring organisational changes are handled in an emotionally intelligent way, ensuring effective communications with staff and tracking progress.

3.3 Human Resources is currently developing training for managers on stress awareness and handling, will provide advice to managers on the guidelines and encourage the appropriate use of Occupational health and counselling services.

3.4 Occupational Health have a key role to play in promoting health and education programmes for staff in helping staff to manage the stresses in their lives and

seek help when they need it. They can also provide expert advice to managers and staff in individual cases and organise referrals to counselling as needed.

- 3.5 Managers have perhaps the major role in supporting employees who show signs of stress, seeking advice from HR and Occupational health as needed, There is much emphasis in the Guidelines on conducting regular one to ones with staff to enable employees to regularly discuss with their managers issues which are worrying them and to ensure that work pressures are managed in a sensible and emotionally intelligent way. The Guidelines advocate risk assessments and remedial action with a view to reducing the overall incidence of stress related absence in the council.
- 3.6 Lastly the role of employees is also emphasised in reporting any concerns to their manager and the guidance explains what to do if employees feel stressed. In terms of prevention, the importance of taking into account the stressors in particular roles and recruiting employees who have sufficient resilience to cope with the emotional demands their roles will place upon them is also emphasised.

#### 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 Financial

The Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report.

##### 4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

The Head of Legal & Democratic Services comments that legal issues have been taken into account in the production of the Guidelines

##### 4.3 Staffing

Contained within report

##### 4.4 Accommodation

There are no implications in the report

4.5 Equalities

Equality Impact Assessment is taking place

4.6 Community Safety

There are no implications in this report

4.7 Sustainability

There are no implications in this report

4.8 Potential Risks

The guidelines reduce the risks of stress related claims

Background papers:

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File reference:

None