

## APPENDIX 3

# DEALING WITH STRESS AT WORK A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES

### **What is stress?**

Stress can be defined as the way you feel when you're under too much pressure.

A moderate amount of pressure can be positive, making us more alert, helping to keep us motivated, and making us perform better. However, too much pressure, or over too long a period, can lead to stress. Stress can cause physical illness and emotional problems.

Each of us reacts differently to pressure. You might feel as though things are getting on top of you whilst a friend or colleague seems to enjoy the same amount of pressure. The situation at home can affect how we feel at work and pressure at work can affect us at home; so no two people can be expected to react in the same way.

### **Isn't stress just a sign of weakness?**

Absolutely not! Stress can happen to anyone and it's not a sign of weakness to talk about it. The Council takes stress seriously and doesn't want any of its staff to be adversely affected by it. All managers are offered training and support in how best to respond to staff who feel stressed.

### **How can stress affect me at work?**

Stress might lead to you being ill and taking time off work. Or it may affect your ability to perform the job and to get on well with your colleagues.

### **What should I do if I'm getting stressed at work?**

Try to work out why you're feeling stressed and think about what you can do to make things better. Ideally, tell your manager before things get too bad. If it's something at work that's causing the stress, or making it worse, this gives your manager a chance to try and help. Even if it isn't work-related, they may be able to reduce some pressure at work to prevent the situation getting worse. You can also refer to the Council's *Stress Management Guidelines*.

You or a family member can contact the confidential and independent *Care First* service on 0800 174319; they can help with information and advice covering a wide range of problems including personal, relationship, work issues and debt problems.

If you're unwell then you should also see your Doctor for help and advice. You can also approach your manager for a referral to the Council's Occupational Health Advisor.

### **What if my manager is the cause of the stress?**

You can talk to their manager, to someone in HR or to your union rep.

### **What if I think a colleague is suffering from stress?**

Offer them support; encourage them to seek appropriate help; and suggest that they tell their line manager straight away.

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### How can I deal with changes at work without getting stressed?

Some people find change more stressful than others. You've probably coped with all sorts of changes over the years. Some might have been big changes such as moving home, getting married, having children, bereavement. Other changes might include coping with new technology, adopting different eating habits, meeting new friends and so on.

There have probably been changes at work too – new people, new equipment, new ways of doing things. And you've probably coped with these changes; even if it was a bit unsettling at the time.

You should certainly let your manager know if changes at work are causing you stress. Make sure you take an active part in any consultation. Read any information about the changes and ask questions. All of these things can help you to feel more in control and less stressed.

You have a responsibility to take care of your self at work and this includes dealing with stress as much as your physical health and safety.

Whilst it's not for the Council to dictate how you behave outside of work you will find it can help you to be less stressed if you:

- eat healthy, balanced meals;
- take regular exercise;
- keep alcohol, smoking and caffeine to a minimum; and
- take time out for relaxing each day.

### Useful sources of information and advice

- Your own GP
- Care First 0800 174319 (calls are free and confidential)
- NHS Direct 0845 4647
- NHS Direct online [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)
- Your union rep or health and safety rep
- The BBC's website has a health section with information, advice and links to various helping agencies and organisations [www.bbc.co.uk/health/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/)
- The Citizens Advice Bureaux is a source of help and advice covering a range of problems including debt [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)