Managing workplace stress

A guide for managers

May 2023

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Introduction

This guide accompanies our Mental Health and Wellbeing policy and is designed to help you assist your team members who are experiencing difficulties with workplace stress. It includes information about the internal and external support available and offers practical advice on what you can do to assist colleagues with their mental health and wellbeing.

What to expect from this guide.

This guide aims to help you to:

- Be confident about your role in managing and supporting people experiencing workplace stress.
- Understand and reduce the factors that could potentially impact a team member's levels of stress in the workplace.
- Seek to address any workplace stressors that impact a team member's performance and / or developing to their full potential.
- Identify appropriate workplace changes or adjustments to support team members and help them thrive at work.
- Foster an inclusive working environment in which everyone is treated fairly.

Every manager should know what workplace stress is, when it happens and how it can affect people.

Stress is someone's natural reaction to perceived excessive pressure; it is not a disease. Where pressure is short lived and not excessive, any effect is likely to be short lived and cause no harm. But if stress is excessive and goes on for some time it can lead to both physical and behavioural effects, such as raised blood pressure, headaches, dizziness, depression and even amental health crisis.

Every person responds to pressures in different ways; an exciting challenge to one person is a worry to another. The levels of stress will vary depending on many factors such as motivation, support from managers, working relationships, work routine, colleagues, family and friends and of course personal resilience.

You play a key role in supporting your team members and should have regular conversations with them to try to identify their workplace stressors.

There is often still a stigma around workplace stress and consequently people going through it will often try to hide their symptoms or be uncomfortable talking about them. We want everyone to understand what workplace stress is and to be able to talk about it openly, without fear or embarrassment and so it is an important issue for us all, not just those experiencing the symptoms of it.

Your role as a people manager

You have an important role to play in ensuring that anyone experiencing workplace stress gets the support they need as soon as possible.

Good people management is fundamental to supporting employee health and wellbeing, spotting early signs of workplace stress and initiating early intervention. It will also help you to retain valuable skills and talent and reduce sickness absence.

As a people manager you are typically:

- The first point of contact if a team member needs to discuss their workplace stress concerns.
- Responsible for implementing the people management policies and practices that can help someone experiencing workplace stress to feel supported and to be effective in their role.
- Responsible for managing absence and keeping in touch if someone is off work ill because of their workplace stress, as well as supporting an effective return to work.

It is important to have an awareness of your own management and leadership style and the impact your behaviours might have on the team you manage.

The HSE Stress Management competency indicator tool can be used to show you how effective you are at preventing and reducing stress in your team. The hard copy tool can be accessed here should you wish to print it out rather than complete it online.

The level of trust you build with team members will determine the extent to which they are able to discuss topics such as workplace stress symptoms and any support or adjustments they need at work.

If there are regular and informal one-to-ones between you and your team members, this can provide an opportunity for a conversation about any changes to their work including identifying any stressors.

Some key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health, lower productivity and increased accident and sickness absence rates. are identified below:

- Demands – this includes issues such as workload (including too little work), work patterns and the work environment.
- Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- Support – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- Relationships – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

- Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- Change – how local or organisational change impacts on the person's job.

It is important to understand that each person's situation is unique, and their experience and symptoms of workplace stress will differ. Asking team members how they are on a regular basis will help to create an open culture and encourage someone to raise any concerns.

Supporting a team member experiencing workplace stress

The key to managing a team member experiencing work-related stress is to take an early intervention approach to investigate and implement controls to reduce the source of pressure they are facing as far as is practicable. Open and regular communication between you and your team member is the simplest and most effective mechanism to do this.

Where your team member has specifically identified that they are experiencing work-related stress (and remain at work) then you should aim to meet with them at an early opportunity. You should explain to your team member that this initial meeting is to investigate the sources of pressure they are facing and if there is anything that can be done to prevent these pressures from building up.

You may find it useful to use the Stress Self-Assessment to help your team member identify the source of their workplace stressors. The Stress Self-Assessment can be issued in advance of the initial meeting for your team member to complete or could be used as the basis for a discussion during a meeting.

On completion of the Stress Self-Assessment, you should aim to meet your team member within 7 calendar days to discuss, and where appropriate, agree any support or adjustment(s) that can be made within defined timescales. It is important to retain adequate records of any agreed actions and timescales to support any subsequent referral to Occupational Health.

As work related stress can be complex, resulting not only from pressure from work but also from a staff member's private life, it is advisable to gather some good professional advice at the earliest opportunity.

Although an early referral to Occupational Health in such circumstances may be beneficial, this should not normally be of benefit or occur prior to a meeting to try to understand the reasons for the issues and discuss reasonable actions to address them.

Where appropriate it would be beneficial to detail any support or adjustments that have already been put in place and/or those requested by an individual that have not reasonably been able to be put in place by submitting a copy of the Stress Self-Assessment alongside a referral to Occupational Health.

It is important to consider that in some circumstances your team member may perceive you to be part of the reason for their work-related stress. If this is the case, then your team member should be encouraged to discuss this where possible with you as their line manager, Human Resources or a trade union representative. If you think that this might be the case, you should discuss options with your HR Adviser. If your team member does not feel comfortable discussing specific matters with you, then they may wish to contact another manager from their service or someone from Human Resources in an attempt to resolve the issue.

For further guidance on supporting an employee experiencing work related stress please contact Human Resources.

Reducing the risk of stress by carrying out a risk assessment.

If you are aware that there are identified roles or known excessive workloads in your team, you must ensure a work-related stress risk assessment is carried out to identify and reduce workplace stressors as far as is reasonably practicable.

The Work-related Stress Risk Assessment has been developed as a step-by-step guide to support you to carry out a stress risk assessment and identify what steps can be taken to reduce the identified stressors.

It is crucial that employees' views are taken into consideration while carrying out a stress risk assessment. To evidence this, it is recommended that the final assessment is 'signed off' by employees or a representative group of employees. This risk assessment should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals and retained alongside other risk assessments.

This risk assessment aims to identify tasks in which there may be a potential to affect employees stress levels, such as dealing with the public, working within tight deadlines or other factors which may cause stress such as heavy workloads or staff shortages.

When completing a stress risk assessment, primary, secondary and tertiary control measures should be considered; primary interventions attempt to eliminate the sources of stress by focusing on changing the physical or socio-political environment to match individual needs; secondary interventions should focus on helping individuals manage stress without trying to eliminate or modify workplace stressors; and tertiary prevention strategies seek to assist individuals who are experiencing on-going problems emanating either from the work environment or their work lives.

For example:

A customer facing employee who regularly deals with customer complaints may be at risk of higher level of stress than employees who do not have regular contact with the public:

Possible primary control measures:

- Customers are asked to make complaints via an online complaints form on MyOrkney**.** which removes the customer facing aspect of this role.
- Customers can also be asked to make complaints in writing which removes the customer facing aspect of this role.
- All customer facing employees dealing with customer complaints are made aware of the Council's Policy on Unacceptable Actions and Challenging Behaviour by Service Users and Complainants.
- A mechanism to report threatening or violent behaviours is introduced so any trends can be tracked, investigated and reduced in the future.
- The underlying reason for the complaint is resolved resulting in a reduction of complaints.

Possible secondary control measures:

- Additional training on dealing with challenging customers is provided.
- Additional training on customer service is provided.

- A designated area away from members of the public to allow them to have an undisturbed break.
- Additional 1:1s with line manager.
- Shadowing arranged with more experienced colleagues.

Possible tertiary control measures (only if the stress cannot be eliminated or controlled):

- Employees are sign posted to training on mindful thinking techniques which may assist them to relax in stressful situations.
- Employees are sign posted to the Managing Personal Stress sessions.
- Employees are sign posted to counselling support.
- Employees are given additional 1:1s so that they understand that they have a caring and supportive line manager.

Further advice and support on carrying out a stress risk assessment can be found on the Council's Intranet Health and Wellbeing (sharepoint.com) and also on the HSE Website or seek advice from Health and Safety or Human Resources.

Please note, an employee or group of employees can request that a risk assessment is carried out by either their line manager, or whereby their line manager is the perceived cause of stress, by another manager within their service. Employees should first seek support from a manager from within their service.

Monitoring

To ensure standards are maintained, and improved where necessary, Orkney Islands Council will undertake ongoing monitoring of the organisation's overall performance.

It will also be the responsibility of each manager to monitor the employees under their supervision for symptoms of stress or other mental health problems and where appropriate provide them with early support, as far as is reasonable and/or possible.

What might you notice?	What could you do?
An increase in unexplained absence or sick leave.	Start by having a quiet word and ask them if everything is okay and if there is anything that you as their manager can do to support them. If your employee doesn't identify an issue then let them know that you are concerned about changes you have noticed recently and assure them that you are there to support them where possible, however it is also important to raise concerns regarding performance/attendance or conduct where necessary.
Poor performance, Poor timekeeping or Poor decision making uncommunicative or moody behaviour.	If work related stress is identified as an issue then explain that you have a responsibility to investigate the reasons for this by carrying out an individual stress risk assessment (see section below).

What might you notice?	What could you do?
	If another mental health problem is identified as an issue e.g. depression/anxiety then ask them what could be done to support them in the workplace.
	Advise them of the free counselling services available to them which they may find useful.
	Make small adjustments as appropriate to help them in the short term e.g. removing a particular task allowing them time to catch up with other work.
	Keep a record of unusual behaviour/changes which may help you with any future Occupational Health referrals.
	If your employee's attendance or performance does not improve then consider a referral to the Council's Occupational Health provider.

Useful resources

As well as a variety of internal resources referred to in this guide and the associated policy, there are a number of links below that may be useful to consider and to signpost colleagues to.

Wellbeing Resources

Resources to support employees and further information can be found within the Wellbeing section of the Council's Intranet.

Managing Personal Stress – Face to Face

For all employees who are prone to stress and would like to investigate the reasons and potential solutions behind work related stress, contact Learning and Development for a place on a Managing Personal stress workshop.

iLearn resources including Dealing with stress, Relaxation and mindfulness.

Trade Unions can be contacted for further advice and support.

Work-related Stress Risk Assessment

Under Orkney Islands Council's Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy where there is a risk of work-related stress as a line manager, you must carry out a risk assessment to identify and, where possible, control the risk of work related stress within your team.

A Work-related Stress Risk Assessment can either be carried out for a specific team or for a group of employees with the same job profile.

The 3 key steps required to carry out a Work-related Stress Risk Assessment are:

- Gathering data.
- Consider what should be achieved.
- Implement a Risk Assessment.

A Work-related Stress Risk Assessment can be carried out directly by you as a line manager or impartially by another manager from within the service.

Step 1 – Gather data:

The HSE Management Standards Indicator tool questionnaire is designed to help identify areas of work related pressures. The document can be printed off and provided to all employees; a representative sample group of employees; or used as a guide for discussion at a team meeting.

It is important to consider what other data may assist you, for example, exit interviews or employee absence history.

You can find the questionnaire by clicking on the following link: HSE MANAGEMENT STANDARDS INDICATOR TOOL

Step 2 - Consider what should be happening / states to be achieved:

Having an awareness of your own management and leadership style and the impact your behaviours might have on your teams is useful to consider here.

The completion of the **HSE Stress Management competency indicator tool** will show you how effective you are at preventing and reducing stress in your team.

It will be useful to consider whether the following are typical within your team:

- Team members are provided with adequate and achievable demands in relation to agreed hours of work.
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands.
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of team members.
- Team members' concerns about their work environment are addressed.
- Where possible, team members have control over their pace of work.
- Team members are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work.
- Where possible, team members are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work.
- Team members are encouraged to develop their skills.
- Team members have a say over when breaks can be taken.
- Team members are consulted over their work patterns.
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage team members to support their colleagues.
- Team members know what support is available and how and when to access it including:
  - Where to go with health and safety concerns.
  - Where to find Orkney Islands Council's HR policies and procedures.
  - Where to go to with work concerns.
- Team members know how to access the required resources to do their job.
- Team members receive regular and constructive feedback.
- Positive behaviours are promoted to avoid conflict and ensure fairness.

- Team members share information relevant to work.
- Unacceptable behaviour is dealt with appropriately.
- Team members are encouraged to report incidents of unacceptable behaviour.
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon team members are compatible.
- The organisation provides information to enable team members to understand their role and responsibilities.
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon team members are clear.
- Systems are in place to enable team members to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.
- Systems are in place to provide team members with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for team members to influence proposals.
- Team members are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, team members are given training to support any changes in their jobs.
- Team members are aware of timetables for changes.
- Team members have access to relevant support during changes.

Step 3 – Implement the Risk Assessment:

When deciding what actions are needed it is important to be realistic and to try and identify hotspots or priority areas to focus on first. It is important that team members, or their representatives, are involved in discussion at this stage as they may be best placed to suggest achievable and practical solutions.

The following risk assessment should be completed based on the outcome of the HSE Management Standards Indicator tool.

Work-related Stress Risk Assessment.

Team/Group/Job Role: **Date:**

This document should be reviewed on an annual basis.

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
Demands: Such as Workload, Work patterns, Work environment.					
Control how much say a person has in the way they do their work.					
Support					

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.					
Relationships includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.					
Role whether people understand their role within the					

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.					
Change how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.					

Manager signature: **Date:**

Employee signature (where appropriate):   **Date:**

Review Date:

Work-related Stress Risk Assessment.

Team/Group/Job Role: **Date:**

This document should be reviewed on an annual basis.

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
Demands Such as Workload, Work patterns Work environment.	Group identified the issue of too much work. This was being made much worse by regularly being interrupted by telephone calls.	Monthly 1:1 where workload forms part of the discussion. Team member working hours are monitored and addressed if regularly losing hours every month.	Deliver bespoke training to team members on managing workload – discussion will be required with Learning and development to determine whether this can be delivered in-house or bought in. Undertake a 'stop' 'start' 'continue'	Manager	3 months

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
			activity to look at what tasks can be stopped/started or required to be continued. Try to remove unnecessary tasks. Team members encouraged to divert their mobile phones to voicemail for up to 1.5 hrs a day allowing them to complete other tasks undisturbed.		
Control how much say a person has in the way they do their work.	Not identified as a particular issue.	Monthly 1:1's	N/A		

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
	Team members generally felt they had a say over their work and how it was carried out.	Quarterly team meetings.			
Support includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.	Team members felt well supported by management however they felt that at times they could not ask colleagues for support due to them also having too much work. It was also difficult to turn to admin for support due to them being	Quarterly team meetings. Monthly 1:1's	Team away day to focus on developing solutions to improve communication between team. Stop, start continue activity as above. Discussion with admin manager	Team Manager All employees Team manager to review after 6 months. Team manager	6 months 6 months 6 months

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
	part of a separate team.		to determine if any way two teams could work together during busy periods of work.		
Relationships includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.	Some team members identified some tension between colleagues.	Team meetings held every quarter.	Run a 'team away day' once a year involving team building activities. Make clear Orkney Islands Council's stance about bullying and harassment via a newsletter and webinar delivered by HR and OD's policies in practice team.	Team Manager Team manager Review issues regularly at 1:1's	6 months Review issues at 1:1's

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
Role Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.	Team members understand their role within their team however did not see how it fits with other teams within their service. Identified that they could work better together on particular issues.	Discussed regularly at 1:1's and team briefs. Wellbeing and Council Newsletters issued regularly via email – pinned on notice board for non-computer users.	Discuss with improvement team whether they could support with a Kaizen for improvement event to investigate how two teams can work better together to deliver service efficiently. Undertake a small 'back to the floor' event with appropriate teams to learn how teams work and how they can interact appropriately in the future.	Senior Practitioner Manager to agree with other teams.	

Type of Stressor.	Specific causes of workplace stress identified within each category.	Existing workplace precautions already in place.	Further action to be taken.	Action owner.	Review Date.
Change How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.	Identified there to be very little appreciation of health and safety implications when change happened. The amount of change was identified as an issue.	Change to workload discussed regularly at quarterly team meetings. Regular 1:1's	Health and safety to become a standing item at all team meetings. Escalate the issue to senior management team to determine if additional resources could be put on or whether projects could be staggered.	Chairperson (rotated) Manager	6 months

Stress - Self Assessment

Please note, this is intended to be used where a team member has identified stress to be caused, wholly or in part, by work.

The following questionnaire aims to focus on possible sources of work-related stress. The information you provide here will help you and your manager identify support mechanisms or reasonable adjustments which can be made to reduce the pressures you face in your work. It is unlikely that your manager will be able to take away all the pressure you face within your working day but will agree adjustments where possible.

Your first point of contact should always be your line manager however if you feel you are under stress created by your work but for whatever reason feel unable to discuss this with your line manager you should contact another manager from within your service or contact Human Resources.

Please complete the following questions that apply to you as honestly as you feel you can and return this to your line manager as agreed with them.

Cause of stress	Question	Is it a problem for you? *Use this space to detail what the problem is. If it is not a problem leave it blank*	What can you do about it? What would help you?	What can Line Management do about it? Can we make any adjustments?
Demands	Do you feel that you have to work very fast or have unachievable deadlines?			
	Are you able to take sufficient breaks?			
	Do you feel pressured to work long hours?			
	Do you feel you have the right resources to undertake the work required from you?			

Cause of stress	Question	Is it a problem for you? *Use this space to detail what the problem is. If it is not a problem leave it blank*	What can you do about it? What would help you?	What can Line Management do about it? Can we make any adjustments?
Control	Do you feel you have some sort of say over the way you work? Do you feel you have a say in how fast you work?			
Support (Manager)	Do you get enough supportive feedback on the work you do? Do you feel you could rely on your manager to help you with a work problem?			

Cause of stress	Question	Is it a problem for you? *Use this space to detail what the problem is. If it is not a problem leave it blank*	What can you do about it? What would help you?	What can Line Management do about it? Can we make any adjustments?
	Do you feel you can ask for support through emotionally demanding work? Do you have the opportunity to speak to your manager at team briefs or 1:1's?			
Support (Peers)	Do you feel your colleagues would help you if work became difficult? Do you get the respect at work you deserve from your colleagues?			

Cause of stress	Question	Is it a problem for you? *Use this space to detail what the problem is. If it is not a problem leave it blank*	What can you do about it? What would help you?	What can Line Management do about it? Can we make any adjustments?
Relationships	Are you personally harassed, in the form of unkind words or behaviour from members of the public or from work colleagues? Do you feel there is friction or anger between colleagues?			
Role	Are you clear about what is expected of you at work? Do you know how to go about getting your job done? *e.g. Do you think you have the right skills and training?*			

Cause of stress	Question	Is it a problem for you? *Use this space to detail what the problem is. If it is not a problem leave it blank*	What can you do about it? What would help you?	What can Line Management do about it? Can we make any adjustments?
Change	Do you have enough opportunities to question managers about change at work?			
	When changes are made at work, are you clear about how they would work out in practice?			
Other issues	Is there anything else that is a source of stress for you, at work or at home that may contribute to work related stress?			

These questions focus on work related stress, however, there may be factors outside work, for example in your family life, which may have contributed to or added to the pressures at work. These may have made it harder to cope with demands at work that you would normally be able to cope with. You may want to share these issues with your manager – they may be able to help at work and make adjustments, for example, being more flexible or just being sympathetic to the pressures you are under.

Self Assessment Questionnaire – Action Plan

This action plan can be completed by your manager who will discuss with you if any adjustments can be taken to try to reduce the pressures you are facing. You should have the opportunity to meet with your manager to agree some of the adjustments and the timescales that can be put in place.

Identified source of stress	Is it possible to make an adjustment	Timescale
e.g. Team member finds it difficult to answer customer complaints as they feel they don't have enough knowledge to provide them with an answer.	e.g. Team member will not be required to answer the telephone over the next 4 weeks and will shadow more experienced colleague while they respond to customer complaints. The team have agreed to produce a list of FAQ to support new members of staff in answering customer complaints	e.g. This arrangement will be reviewed in 4 weeks. 4 weeks

If your team member answers yes to questions "Are you unable to take sufficient breaks?" and "Do you feel pressurised to work long hours?" Line managers must consider the Working Time Regulations and if you require any further advice or guidance on this please contact Human Resources.

Manager signature: **Employee Signature:**

Date: **Date:**

This document should be retained by the line manager.