Stress Policy

1 Introduction

1.1 This is a supporting document to the Health and Safety Policy.

1.2 The Council of the Isles of Scilly is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees. We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

2 Definition of Stress

2.1 The Health and Safety Executive define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them". This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health, undermine performance, and be costly to the Council and devastating to the individual.

3 Causes of Stress

3.1 People react in different ways to different types of stress. What one person finds exciting and challenging another can find daunting. A repetitive, boring job for one person can be fulfilling to someone else.

3.2 An individual's reaction to stress can often be influenced by their personality, experience, motivation and the level of support received from their manager, colleagues, friends and family.

3.3 Certain jobs may place extra emotional demands on staff, e.g. those dealing with people in distress or requiring help. Physical conditions too can be stressful, e.g. excessive noise, heat/humidity, bad lighting or lack of space.

3.4 It should also be remembered that the source of stress may be from outside the workplace. Staff who are experiencing stress caused by home, family or financial pressures may find it difficult to separate these from their working life and consequently are not able to deal with work matters efficiently and effectively.

4   Symptoms and Indicators of Stress

4.1   People can react in many ways when facing danger or feeling threatened. Listed below are a few of the common 'signs' that indicate when someone may be suffering from stress.

Physical effects	Emotional effects	Behavioural effects
Pounding heart	Anxiety	Overeating
Blurred vision	Restlessness	Under eating
Increased sweating	Worrying	Angry outbursts
Muscle aches	Irritability	Drug abuse
Headaches	Depression	Excessive drinking
Skin rashes	Sadness	Increased smoking
Dizziness	Anger	Social withdrawal
Lowering resistance to infections	Mood swings	Crying spells
Loss/gain in weight	Job dissatisfaction	Relationship conflicts
Stomach upset / constipation	Feeling insecure	Decreased productivity
Tiredness	Confusion	Blaming others
Chest pain	Burnout	Regularly late for work
Back pain	Forgetfulness	Sleeplessness
Clenched jaw	Resentment	Poor decision making
Tooth grinding	Guilt	Increased absence from the workplace
	Inability to concentrate	
	Seeing only the negatives	

5   What We Will Do

- We will identify workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.

- We will consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the workplace stress.

- We will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.

- We will make available to all staff: mental health & wellbeing workshops in conjunction with the Public Health Coordinator and the Mental Health Coordinator.

- We will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors. This service is provided by "Just Solutions" Mediation. Referrals may also be made to Occupational Health Service Cornwall.

- We will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company's agreed stress management policy.

6 Responsibilities of Managers

- Conduct and implement recommendations of individual risks assessments relating to stress within their jurisdiction.

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

- Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties and are offered appropriate training opportunities.

- Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.

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

- Monitor holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.

- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.

- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.

- Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation. Managers will endeavour to provide flexible working hours when required if an employee is experiencing personal difficulties/stress.

7 Health & Wellbeing representative (In conjunction with Health & Safety Officer)

- Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.

- Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress. Employees are allowed to attend these during normal working hours.

- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments

- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress. Report to management at least annually regarding the results of the review.

- Inform the employer and the Health and Safety Committee of any changes and development in the field of stress at work.

8   Human resources

- Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.

- Help monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.

- Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counsellors where appropriate.

- Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their line manager on a planned return to work.

- Refer to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.

9   Employees

- Raise issues of concern with your line manager, HR; your Safety Representative or Health & Safety Officer.

- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide helpful information on developing strategies to manage work-induced stress: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/wrs.htm

- Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended using the Staff Telephone and Advice Service "Just Solutions" and Occupational Health specialists.

10   Safety Representatives
(Consisting of Union & non-Union Representatives and the Health & Safety Committee)

- Safety representatives must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.

- Safety representatives must be able to consult with members of the Health & Safety committee on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.

- Safety representatives must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process.

- Safety representatives should be allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR.

- Safety representatives should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to workplace stress.

- Safety representatives should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least annually to ensure that environment stressors are properly controlled.

11 Safety Committee
(Consisting of Senior Officers, Members, Union and non-Union Representatives, Members of the Health & Wellbeing Board and the Health & Safety Officer and HR)

- The joint Safety Committee will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.

- The Safety Committee will oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

12 Simple steps to coping with Stress

12.1 As individuals react differently to stress, so we all have different coping strategies. It is worth exploring what works for you in terms of short-term symptom relief and what you can do to provide long-term protection against harmful stress ("stress proofers").

12.2 Short-term relief might be achieved by something as simple as taking time out, perhaps by using a relaxation technique, by taking part in some physical activity or simply talking to someone about how you feel.

12.3 Longer-term "stress proofers" could include the following:

- Work off stress with physical activity. Aim to spend at least 20 minutes three times a week doing some vigorous activity which raises your pulse rate and which you enjoy.

- Eat well. A balanced diet is necessary for good health and good health helps you to handle the pressures of everyday life.

- Know when you're tired and do something about it. Get enough sleep and rest to recharge your batteries. Start the day feeling refreshed.

- Learn to relax. Take time out to do nothing in particular. Try to use a stress reduction technique (breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, music) that you feel comfortable with on a daily basis.
- Plan your work in order to manage your energy and time most effectively. Take one thing at a time, learn to say 'No' and create time buffers to deal with unexpected emergencies.
- Learn to accept what you cannot change.
- Avoid harmful ways of coping with stress such as drinking, smoking or compulsive eating. They may seem to relieve stress but in the long run they can add to it and lead to poor health.

13   If symptoms persist

- Talk the problem over - perhaps with a close friend, a colleague or your manager.

- Seek professional help or counselling either privately through the Occupational Health Unit or through the Council's confidential counselling service provided by "Just Solutions".

- See your GP.

14   Advice for Managers

14.1 Managers must recognise that harmful levels of stress can occur when pressures pile up, or people become confused, particularly by conflicting demands being placed upon them. Uncertainty and change, severe fluctuations in workloads and inflexible schedules may also cause problems for individuals.

14.2 As a Manager, you can influence workloads and priorities. You play an important intermediary role between individual staff members and the organisation. As a result, this can have a significant effect on how well the Council manages stress in its employees.

14.3 Managers are also communicators. It is important that you use communication effectively to allay fears and concerns within the workplace, particularly with issues such as change, security, pay and status.

14.4 *Look at your own management style:*

- Are you approachable?

- Can employees discuss workload pressures with you?

- Listen to gossip, news about somebody being under stress often comes through a third party, and often indirectly

- Recognise that stress can happen to all of us, including you. This will allow you to deal with employees suffering from stress sympathetically.

- Don't talk, listen. Make sure you direct employees to where they can obtain support when it is necessary.

  The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provide a useful tool for line managers to pro-actively examine their management style and seek input from those they manage: http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm

14.5 Look for stress factors within the working environment and identify these in your risk assessment.

14.6 The Management Standards approach has been developed by the Health & Safety Executive to give managers the help they need to reduce the incidence of work related stress. They cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

- **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, 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 organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

14.7 The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that, if present, reflect a high level of health well-being and organisational performance