



"Bringing out the Best in Everyone"

## **Pebble Brook School**

### **Occupational Stress Policy**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ dated \_\_\_\_\_

Chair of Governors

<b>Date Approved /Ratified</b>	Spring 2024
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## Introduction

Buckinghamshire Council values its employees and believes that all members of staff are entitled to an appropriate work / life balance. The expectations placed on staff need to be manageable and realistic and reflect the level of responsibility within the organisation. Effective performance management systems, including regular meetings with team members, should enable Managers to monitor the pressure on individual employees. Buckinghamshire Council is keen to support organisational recognition of good employment practice such as Investors in People and the Wellbeing Programmes.

Despite striving to establish good employment practice, Buckinghamshire Council recognises that some individuals will, on occasions, find the pressures and demands of their work stressful. Stress has the potential to become a serious problem for staff working for Buckinghamshire Council due to the ever-increasing pressures of work and seemingly continuous changes taking place.

Stress can impair individual's work performance and lead to poor working relationships, high staff turnover, sickness absence and low staff morale. Stress can spread throughout the organisation, having an adverse effect on its functioning as other staff bear an increased workload to cover for their colleagues. Early identification and the use of appropriate supportive strategies are essential in order to prevent difficulties developing into major problems.

Buckinghamshire Council recognises that to suffer from stress is not a sign of personal weakness, nor should it be seen as an inevitable part of modern life. There are positive steps that Managers and individuals can, and should, take to reduce the risk of stress-induced ill health.

This guidance has been written in order to help individuals and Managers to recognise and manage stress effectively and consist of:

- A statement of the Buckinghamshire Council approach to tackling stress within the organisation.
- General information about stress, its causes and how to recognise it.
- Guidance for Managers on recognising stress within the organisation and strategies for managing stress effectively.
- Guidance for all staff on coping with stress.
- Stress Hazard Checklist.
- Example Stress Risk Assessment for a team / establishment (Appendix 1).

# Tackling Stress within Buckinghamshire Council

## 1. Overall Approach

The duty of employers to look after the health, safety and welfare of its employees includes a duty to reduce, as far as reasonably practicable, stress likely to cause ill health.

Buckinghamshire Council recognises that:

- No strategy for managing stress is likely to be successful unless it tackles the causes at source and has the support of the Chief Officer's Management Team.
- Although there are ways in which individuals can be helped to recognise and manage their own stress, this will not be as effective as tackling stress at its source by eliminating or reducing the stress which can be caused by work and the organisation itself.
- Stress does not indicate weakness or failure and that physical and mental ill health caused by stress can be prevented. Most people who already have a stress-related problem can also be successfully helped.

The Chief Officer's Management Team (COMT) is committed to the running of an annual organisational health survey to help to effectively identify areas and causes of stress and to facilitate effective targeting of actions.

Stress within the organisation, a service or an establishment will also be identified by consultation with employees and by the use of the appropriate absence monitoring system. This can pick up ill health trends and patterns of individuals or groups so that action can be taken to eliminate or reduce the sources of stress identified.

## 2. Risk Assessment

Workplace stress can be a risk to the health and wellbeing of employees, and as such, should be assessed and eliminated or controlled like any other risk as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Risk Assessment provides a framework for effectively identifying and evaluating the risk stress presents to staff in the workplace and for identifying

the measures necessary to eliminate or control it to a reasonable level. Stress may be linked to other risks to health and safety such as working with Display Screen Equipment (DSE), excessive noise or violence.

A 3 tier approach has been adopted to the assessment and management of stress based on HSE guidance and their Stress Management Standards.

- Each service is required to produce an Action Plan based on the results of the most recent Organisational Health Survey which will be reviewed and updated regularly. The Action Plan serves as the Stress Risk Assessment for the service.
- A local team or establishment Stress Risk Assessment carried out by the Manager, identifying any risk factors particular to that group of employees and any variations to the arrangements outlined in the service Risk Assessment – an example is given in Appendix 1.
- Individual employee Stress Risk Assessment where circumstances require it.

### **3. The Manager's Role**

Managers have a responsibility to be alert to employees displaying signs of stress and to act accordingly and to implement the Risk Assessment approach at local level. See the Managers' Guide for what actions are expected.

### **4. Coping with Stress – Self Help**

There are a number of things that staff can do to help reduce their own and colleagues' stress and these are outlined in 'Stress at Work, A Guide for Employees'.

## **General Information on Stress**

### **5. What is Stress?**

Stress is very difficult to define and can mean different things to different people. Generally stress is thought of as being 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them'.

This makes an important distinction between the beneficial effect of reasonable pressure and challenge (which can be stimulating, motivating and can give a 'buzz') and work-related stress which is the natural but distressing reaction to demands or 'pressures' that a person perceives they cannot cope with at a given time.

Too little pressure can be as harmful as too much, for instance, where someone is in a boring, uninteresting job they can become lethargic and unproductive.

Work-related stress is not an illness but if it is prolonged can lead to physical or psychological health problems.

## **6. What Causes Stress?**

Stress is created and influenced by both work and home life and individuals have widely varying capacity to cope.

Stress is purely an individual matter and people can place undue pressure upon themselves without realising it.

## **7. Stress at Work**

The causes of stress vary but there are a number of common factors which may cause stress. These have been identified by the HSE as falling into 6 main risk areas:

### **7.1 Demands**

Workload, work pattern and work environment.

- Repetitive, boring tasks.
- Too much / too little work.
- Poor customer relations.
- Actual or threatened violence or abuse.
- Inappropriate client or pupil / staff ratios.
- Insufficient training.
- Poor working environment – space, noise, cleanliness, lighting, temperature.
- Poor skill / ability match to job.

### **7.2 Control**

How much say a person has in the way they do their job.

- Lack of control.
- Inadequate breaks.
- Inflexible hours / work patterns.
- No or little scope for decision making.
- Shift work, unsociable hours.
- Poor career development.

### **7.3 Support**

Encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided.

- Inadequate supervision.
- Insufficient resources.
- Lack of feedback.

### **7.4 Relationships**

Promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

- Personality conflicts.
- Bullying or harassment.
- Discrimination.
- Unequal distribution of work.

### **7.5 Role**

Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.

- Role ambiguity.
- Unclear policies and standards.
- Inappropriate / ill-defined responsibility.
- Poor communication.

### **7.6 Change**

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

- Changing expectations.
- Job changes.
- Organisational changes.
- Changes in management or management style.
- Job insecurity.



## **7.7 Personal Factors**

In addition a number of personal factors may play a part in a person's response.

- Unrealistic expectations of self and others.
- Sense of injustice.
- Conflict between work and home life.
- Poor perceived status.

## **8. Other Causes of Stress**

Apart from work there are other factors which can increase the stress load on an individual such as their health or that of a dependant, relationships with family and friends, money problems, etc. and their own personality. The effects of these may manifest themselves at work and if affecting work performance will also need to be addressed.

## **9. How to Recognise Stress**

Stress can affect people in a variety of ways – physically and mentally.

An individual may find it difficult to recognise that they are suffering adverse effects of stress and may need their colleagues or Manager to help them to identify this.

Warning signs that you or someone else may be suffering unduly from stress include:

### **9.1 Work Performance**

- Absenteeism.
- Poor timekeeping.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Overworking.
- Failure to delegate.
- Drop in usual standards of work.
- Increased accidents.

### **9.2 Interpersonal Relationships**

- Unusual irritability or aggression.
- Becoming withdrawn or unsociable.
- Increased resentment of advice.
- Unwillingness to co-operate.

### **9.3 Behaviour**

- Changes in appetite, appearance, behaviour.
- Increased coffee, cigarette, alcohol or drug use.
- Sleep disturbance.

### **9.4 Psychological Symptoms**

- Fatigue.
- Anxiety.
- Tension.
- Boredom.
- Low self-esteem.
- Tearfulness.

### **9.5 Physical Symptoms**

- Headaches.
- Indigestion.
- Muscle tension.
- Chest and back pains.

Prolonged stress may exacerbate or trigger more chronic health problems such as raised blood pressure, heart disease, stomach ulcers and depression.

## **10. Further Information and Training**

Stress Management, Guidelines for Managers.  
Stress at Work, A Guide for Employees.

The following references were used whilst developing this Code of Practice:

Tackling Work Related Stress, HSG218 HSE Books.

Real Solutions, Real People, a Manager's guide to talking work-related stress  
HSE Books.

Managing Occupational Stress: A Guide for Managers and Teachers in the  
Schools Sector Education Advisory Committee, HSE Books.

Human Resources organise a number of training courses which directly or indirectly help staff identify and manage stress in themselves and others. In addition, video and other training materials on the subject of stress and related topics are also available for loan from Human Resources.

A course is available for Managers – ‘The Manager’s Role in Managing Stress and Promoting Employee Wellbeing’. For more information see the Health and Safety Training pages on the Intranet.

REMEMBER, stress is not an inevitable part of working life – there are many positive steps that can be taken, most of which do not cost anything.

## **11. Stress at Work: A Guide for Employees**

Pressure is good for us to help meet life’s challenges but stress can harm our physical and mental wellbeing.

People vary widely in how they respond to stress and the way they cope. Buckinghamshire Council is committed to dealing with stress at an organisational level rather than relying on individuals to adapt and deal with stress in isolation.

If you feel that there are organisational matters which are contributing to or causing you stress talk to your Line Manager and colleagues as soon as possible so that something can be done. You can use the Stress Hazard Checklist as a prompt on the issues that may be affecting you.

There are things that you can do to help yourself to make you more ‘stress proof’.

### **11.1 What Causes Stress?**

This will vary from person to person but commonly would result from one or a combination of:

#### **11.1.1 Work**

- Too much or too little.
- Interpersonal relationships.
- Change and job uncertainty.
- Insufficient training.
- Unclear roles and responsibilities.
- Harassment.

#### **11.1.2 Home**

- Health, money or family worries.

#### **11.1.3 Individual Personality**

- High expectations of self and others.

#### **11.1.4 Environment**

Noise.  
Overcrowding.  
Commuting.

### **11.2 How to Recognise Stress**

The effects vary and may include:

- Poor sleep, fatigue, irritability.
- Lack of concentration.
- Feelings of loneliness, helplessness.
- Over or under eating.
- Headaches, muscular aches and pains.
- Digestive disorders.
- Anxiety, depression, other psychological problems.

Long term stress may also lead to or contribute to more serious ill health. Admitting that stress is having an adverse effect on your health or wellbeing is not a sign of weakness or failure but the first step towards doing something positive to manage stress.

### **11.3 Managing Stress**

Buckinghamshire Council recognises that the work our staff do can often be very stressful and have introduced a code of practice and guidance for Managers to make sure that stress problems are recognised and tackled.

Managers have a responsibility to identify the sources of stress in the workplace and take action to prevent or control them using a Risk Assessment approach.

### **11.4 Stress Self-Help**

There are things that you can do to help yourself and others:

#### **11.4.1 For Others**

- Be aware of the effects of your own actions on others – you may be a source of stress yourself!
- Learn to recognise the effects of stress in others and how to help them.

#### **11.4.2 For Yourself**

- Take regular exercise which will help relieve mental and physical tension.

- Learn to switch off from work and relax.
- Ensure a good balance of work and home life – it is too easy to let work dominate. Develop interests outside work, a hobby or activity you enjoy.
- Learn to share your problems with friends, family or colleagues.
- Do not set yourself unrealistic targets or goals, set priorities, delegate where possible and manage your time.
- Learn to say “no” and do not be afraid to ask for help.
- Improve your interpersonal / assertiveness skills through training or other means.
- Review your expectations of yourself and others. Are they realistic?
- Avoid harmful ways of coping such as drinking, smoking, drugs and overeating as these just mask underlying feelings.
- Seek help when you need it.

### **11.5 Where to go for Further Help**

- Your Line Manager, particularly if stress is work related.
- If you cannot talk to your Line Manager, talk to your service area Human Resources Officer.
- Friends, family, colleagues.
- External agencies – your GP (health centres often have a counselling service), Citizens Advice, specialist agencies, RELATE, Teacher Support Line.
- Human Resources run a number of relevant training courses. Check the Training and Development intranet site for further details.
- Buckinghamshire Council Occupational Health provider – referral through service area Human Resources Officers.

## **12. Stress Management Guidelines for Managers**

### **12.1 Introduction**

These guidelines are intended to help Managers identify and deal with workplace stress which may be having an adverse effect on the work of the service area or section or individuals within it.

More detailed information about the definition, causes and how to recognise stress is given in the Code of Practice on Occupational Stress. A short guide for employees 'Stress at Work' is also available.

### **12.2 Your Role as Manager**

As a Manager you are responsible for identifying the sources of stress in the workplace and, where possible, taking action to prevent or control them. You will know your staff and how they work and interact so are in the best position to notice any changes which may indicate that they are over stressed.

### **12.3 Identifying Problems**

Because of the serious effects that stress can have on an organisation it is important that Managers are able to identify and manage stress-related problems in the workplace.

Organisational effects include high staff turnover, poor or deteriorating sickness absence records, discipline problems, declining productivity and poor team working.

Individual effects include poor work performance and working relationships and changes in behaviour, e.g. becoming withdrawn or irritable.

Information about whether and where stress problems are occurring should be obtained through monitoring sickness absence records for trends and patterns, discussion with staff at appraisals, one-to-ones and team meetings and after consultation with employee representatives. This information can be used to identify particular sources of stress and enable action to be taken to control them where possible.

### **12.4 Non-Workplace Stress**

Obviously not all stress is work-related, staff may have personal, health, family or other problems which may affect their wellbeing and work performance and make them more vulnerable to workplace stress.

Staff should be encouraged to raise such problems with their Manager and then sources of any appropriate help or support can be identified. Temporary

arrangements may be needed to allow staff time to sort out problems or seek help.

## **12.5 Risk Assessment**

Workplace stress can be a risk to the health and wellbeing of staff and, as such, should be assessed and eliminated or controlled like any other risk as required by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Risk Assessment provides a framework for effectively identifying and evaluating the risk stress presents to staff in the workplace and for identifying the measures necessary to eliminate or control it to a reasonable level.

Stress may be linked to other risks to health and safety such as working with Display Screen Equipment (DSE), excessive noise or violence.

A 3 tier approach has been adopted to the assessment and management of stress based on HSE guidance and their Stress Management Standards.

1. Each service is required to produce an Action Plan based on its most recent OHS results and this Action Plan serves as the Stress Risk Assessment for the service. It will be supplemented by other information where necessary, e.g. actions may be needed as a result of information from other sources (sickness absence, exit interviews, turnover). The plan will be reviewed and updated regularly. Managers are responsible for ensuring that actions are implemented at local level where necessary and, where they are not for any reason, this should be reflected in the local team / establishment Risk Assessment.
2. A local team or establishment Risk Assessment should be carried out by the Manager, identifying any risk factors particular to that group of employees and local actions needed to implement the service assessment. The Stress Hazard Checklist can be used as a prompt. See Appendix 1 for an example of a team / establishment Risk Assessment.
3. It is not necessary to carry out a Stress Risk Assessment for each individual employee, however, there may be circumstances where their Manager should carry out an individual Risk Assessment. This includes where an individual:
  - Is having personal problems outside work.
  - Has suffered from past stress-related ill health.
  - Is exhibiting signs of stress or is reporting that they are having stress-related problems.
  - Returns to work after stress-related sickness absence.

Workload and other stress-related issues should be discussed at one-to-ones and appraisals. Employees can often feel isolated and unable to share their problems with others. Creating a supportive culture can help eliminate feelings of having to cope alone and reduce stress. The aim is to create an environment in which stress is not seen as an individual weakness or failure. The Stress Hazard Checklist can be used as a prompt for these discussions.

General Risk Assessment training is available through workshops organised by the Health and Safety Team, contact them for details.

## **12.6 Control Measures**

Many stress control measures are good management practice. See the Stress Hazard Checklist for a list of the key measures.

## **12.7 Other Control Measures**

### **12.7.1 Training**

Doing a job for which you are not adequately trained can lead to increased and unnecessary stress. It is important that employee training needs are regularly assessed and fulfilled. In addition to on the job training and coaching and skills based training, specific courses may be useful, e.g.:

- Time management.
- Management skills.
- Assertiveness / influencing skills.
- Stress management.

### **12.7.2 Employee Appraisal**

At employee appraisals the opportunity should be taken to encourage employees to raise any problems arising from work which may be creating stress, such as conflicting priorities, excessive workload, lack of job satisfaction and training needs and discuss ways of resolving these.

Training for appraisal and guidelines for Managers are available to help you get the most out of the appraisal process. The Stress Hazard Checklist may also be useful.

### **12.7.3 External Influences**

Not all stresses will be within your control, many arise from external influences, however, how you deal with these will influence the amount of stress they create for you and your staff. Effective communication is of particular importance, Change and uncertainty can often be a cause of stress, the effects of which need to be anticipated and minimised.



#### **12.7.4 Employee Participation**

Studies have shown that one of the groups most vulnerable to stress are those who have little influence over their work and are not involved in decision making processes. Wherever possible, involve employees in organising work, setting goals, deciding priorities, etc. and in particular, when identifying the sources of workplace stress and developing solutions to them.

#### **12.8 Severe / Chronic Cases**

Where stress leads to a severe medical problem resulting in the inability of the employee to undertake the duties of their post, and it is not reasonable or possible to alleviate the cause(s), the situation should be fully explored with the employee and, where necessary, Buckinghamshire Council procedures for dealing with ill health problems should be called upon.

#### **12.9 Further Action**

IF you feel that you are unable to eliminate or control stress to a reasonable level, particularly if the problem is an organisational one outside your own influence, then notify your own Line Manager outlining the problem and any suggested solutions. This will ensure that problems are recognised and dealt with at an appropriate level.

#### **12.10 Sources of Additional Support**

There may be instances where action, help or support by a Manager and colleagues is inappropriate or ineffective. In these cases referral to specialist help may be necessary. The route of referral will depend on the particular problems experience but the following help is available:

- Service area HR Officers.
- External agencies such as General Practitioners, Citizens Advice, RELATE, Samaritans, Teacher Support Line
- County Occupational Health provider. Employees should be referred by their Line Manager through their service area HR Officer for access to this service.

## Appendix 1

### Stress Hazard Checklist

This checklist can be used in a variety of ways:

- At return to work interviews and one-to-ones where an individual has indicated or is showing signs of a work-related stress problem.
- By individuals who feel they may have a work-related stress problem to help identify causes for discussion with their Manager.
- By teams / groups / establishments to help them assess the risks from stress in their team and identify action which needs to be taken to reduce the risk.
- By Managers when reviewing or creating new job vacancies to check the job scope and content does not have inherent factors which could contribute to stress.
- Before a major change is introduced.

Use this as a guide to help determine particular issues that may be a problem.

<b>Hazard</b>
<b>Demands – workload, work patterns and work environment</b>
Are demands on employees achievable within agreed hours of work?
Are demands matched to people's skills and abilities?
Is the physical environment comfortable – temperature, lighting, furniture, layout, etc.?
Are employees exposed to the threat of verbal or physical violence from clients, pupils or members of the public?
<b>Control – how much say a person has over the way they do their work</b>
Are employees able to control the pace and how their work is done?
Are employees encouraged to show initiative and use their full range of skills?
Are employees encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work?
Are employees consulted over their work patterns?
Do employees have a say over when breaks can be taken?
<b>Support – encouragement , sponsorship and resources</b>
Are systems in place to enable and encourage Managers to support employees?
Are employees able and encouraged to support their colleagues?
Do employees know what support is available and when and how to access it?
Do employees know how to access the required resources to do their job?
Do employees receive regular and constructive feedback?

<b>Hazard</b>
<b>Relationships – positive working, avoiding conflict and unacceptable behaviour</b>
Are Managers able and encouraged to deal with unacceptable behaviour?
Are employees able and encouraged to report unacceptable behaviour?
Are openness, honesty and respect encouraged within teams?
<b>Role – understanding role and lack of conflicting roles</b>
Are conflicting demands placed on employees?
Do employees understand their role and responsibilities, e.g. induction procedure, clear job descriptions and person specifications?
Are employees able to raise concerns about uncertainties and conflict they have in the role and responsibilities?
<b>Change – how organisational change is managed and communicated</b>
Does the organisation ensure that employees understand the reasons for changes?
Are employees consulted on change and are opportunities provided for employees to influence the proposals?
Are employees made aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs and if necessary are given training to support any changes in their jobs?
Do employees have access to relevant support during changes?

## Appendix 2

### Stress Risk Assessment Form

**Service Area:** xxxx Service

**Section Location:** yyy Team

**Name of Assessor(s):**

**Date of Assessment:**

**Job Type / Work Activity:** Stress

**Frequency / Duration:**

What are the Hazards? (Causes of Stress)	Who might be harmed and how? (Who is at special risk?)	What are you already doing? (Current control measures, including those for people at special risk)	What further action is necessary? (Further control measures)	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done	Control Measures acceptable (taking into account all controls) Yes / No
<p><b>Demands</b></p> <p>There are high demands on the team in March this year</p> <p>Angry clients often phone up</p>	<p>All team members</p> <p>All team members</p>	<p>Phones are organised so they are distributed to the whole team. A/L restricted to essential only in March</p> <p>All the team have had personal safety training which covers dealing with difficult calls. All incidents are discussed with the Line Manager, serious incidents at the team meeting</p>					<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Control</b></p> <p>Data input part of job is very repetitive</p>	<p>Admin team members</p>	<p>Tasks are shared, if a backlog develops other team members assist.</p>					<p>Yes</p>

What are the Hazards? (Causes of Stress)	Who might be harmed and how? Who is at special risk?	What are you already doing? (Current control measures, including those for people at special risk)	What further action is necessary? (Further control measures)	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done	Control Measures acceptable (taking into account all controls) Yes / No
<b>Support</b> Location of team members (spread over several floors) hinders communication	All team members	Regular team meetings are held	Team will be located in the same place when office moves take place	SB	April 2008		Yes
<b>Role</b> There are often conflicting demands from employees, Managers and other team members	All team members	Annual Team Action Plan is produced to outline work priorities	Regular discuss must take place at team meetings and one-to-ones to balance conflicting demands	SB	Ongoing		Yes
<b>Change</b> Budget cuts are to be made in the next 6 months	All team members		Suggestions on efficiencies / savings to be invited at team meetings. MTP bid to be made for training programme costs. Assurances given regarding jobs.	SB	Jan 2008		Yes

Signed off by: .....

Date: .....

Further controls need to be in place and monitored as satisfactory before finally signing off this assessment.

Revision Date: .....