



WELL BEING POLICY

October 2007

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WELL BEING POLICY

1.0 Purpose

Antrim Borough Council is committed to promoting a healthy and supportive working environment for all staff, and acknowledges that it has a duty of care for the mental health and well being of employees.

This Policy sets out the Council's intentions for the management of stress at work, as part of its overall management of health and safety and recognises the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

It is acknowledged that excessive stress can often arise outside of the work environment, and that this may impact upon well being at work also.

Staff are also encouraged to take personal responsibility for their own well being at work and support others to do the same.

2.0 Scope of Policy

The Policy applies to all staff in the Council.

3.0 Policy

This Policy sets out the Council's intentions for the management of stress at work by-

- 3.1 Identifying all workplace stressors including conducting risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- 3.2 Providing training as identified through the Personal Development Plans for all managers and supervisory staff
- 3.3 Providing all staff with stress awareness training
- 3.4 Consulting with Trade Unions on all actions to prevent workplace stress
- 3.5 Providing an Employee Assistance Programme (confidential counselling) for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors
- 3.6 Promoting the importance of work-life balance for all employees

4.0 Definition and Causes of Stress

4.1 What is stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as

“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand 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 both mental and physical health. Stress can be caused by pressures at home or at work, or a combination of both.

The HSE advises that, in principle, everyone can experience stress. Work-related stress exists where people perceive they cannot cope with what is being asked of them.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities:

5.1 The Role of Managers

Managers have a critical role in minimising and managing stress risks. The role of Managers is to:-

- 5.1.1 Conduct and implement recommendations from risk assessments within their Section, and recognise that stress can be due to lone working for example.
- 5.1.2 Ensure good communication with staff, particularly where there are organizational and procedural changes
- 5.1.3 Ensure staff are fully trained to discharge their duties
- 5.1.4 Ensure staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities
- 5.1.5 Monitor workloads to ensure that staff are not overloaded
- 5.1.6 Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not over working. This includes holidays to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- 5.1.6 Attend training in good management practice and health and safety
- 5.1.7 Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their department
- 5.1.8 Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work – eg bereavement or separation.
- 5.1.9 Comply with the requirements of all Council Policies and in particular ensure that the Council’s Managing Attendance Policy is complied with.

5.1.10 Ensure that work life balance is give a high priority and that measures are taken to minimise contact outside of normal working hours.

5.2 Human Resources

The role of Human Resources is to:-

5.2.1 Monitor the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating and analysing sickness absence statistics

5.2.2 Advise managers and individuals on training requirements

5.2.3 Promote the use of Employee Assistance Programmes (Carecall)

5.3 Employees

The role of employees is to: -

5.3.1 Raise issues of concern to a line manager, the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor or Safety representative

5.3.2 Accept opportunities for counselling when recommended

5.3.3 Attend training as required by managers

5.3.4 Take responsibility for their own health and well being

Note: Stress is not a sign of weakness. Employees should not hesitate to seek support if they are experiencing stress, or feel they are at risk of stress.

5.4 Health Safety and Well Being Advisor

The role of the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor is to:-

5.4.1 Give guidance to managers on the Well Being Policy

5.4.2 Ensure early intervention with staff and support staff who have been absent due to stress and assist with a planned return to work, taking the advices of GPs and Occupational Health as part of the process

5.4.3 Recommend improvement strategies relating to stress management

5.4.4 Promote, evaluate and continually improve the Corporate Healthy Lifestyle Scheme

5.4.5 Obtain feedback from staff through surveys and focus groups

5.4.6 To promote annual National Stress Awareness days

5.5 Employer of Choice Group

The role of the Employer of Choice Group is to:-

5.5.1 Monitor the Corporate Healthy Lifestyle Scheme

5.5.2 Review feedback from staff surveys and implement action plans

5.5.3 Continue to promote and monitor work-life balance

5.5.4 Monitor and review policy implementation and other measures to reduce stress

5.6 Safety Representatives

The role of the Safety Representative is to:-

5.6.1 Respond to consultations on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress

5.6.2 Consult their members on the issue of stress, including conducting any workplace surveys

5.6.3 Participate in the risk assessment process

6.0 Management of Stress-related Absence

Managers should be consistent and follow the agreed absence management procedure as clearly laid out in the Council's Managing Attendance Policy.

6.1 In particular, managers should monitor, and be aware that, increased or more frequent absences may indicate an underlying stress problem, and that early intervention is essential.

6.2 Managers should use the opportunity of return-to-work interviews to discuss stress-related problems when appropriate.

6.3 Where an absence is stress-related, an early referral to Human Resources/ Health Safety and Well Being Advisor is essential. Managers should always seek advice from Human Resources, or the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor if in any doubt.

7.0 Support:

7.1 For Managers

Appropriate training will be available for managers in order to implement this policy. Its main aim will be to assist managers in

identifying stress-related problems and to minimise associated risks.

7.1.1 Managers should not hesitate to seek advice and/or support if they feel they need it.

7.1.2 Managers should also be aware of all other relevant policies (eg Dignity & Respect, Work Life Balance, Managing Attendance). Such awareness enables better planning and decision-making.

7.1.3 Managers should use the Performance Management process to encourage two way communication and enable employees to raise any issues of concern.

7.1.4 Managers should attend all training that is organised to equip them with the necessary management skills

7.2 For Employees

7.2.1 All employees have access to the Council's confidential Employee Assistance Programme - Carecall Counselling Service (tel. **028 9024 5821**). Details are posted on notice boards. Appointments can be made at any time, including during working hours. The service is free and confidential, and employees are encouraged to use this service, whatever the nature of the stress-related problem.

7.2.2 Lack of skills, in a new role for example, can cause stress, and employees should approach their manager to discuss training and development needs at any time.

7.2.3 Councils Performance Management process can be used as an opportunity to discuss any issues which are concerning.

7.2.4 Where employees are experiencing stress that is having a significant effect on their health and well-being, the Council will support and work with the employee to identify reasonable adjustments which would minimise risk and facilitate a successful return to work.

7.2.5 Employees may also get support from their Trade Union/Staff Representative.

8.0 Implementation

8.1 Education and Awareness

- 8.1.1 All staff will receive training on the Council's policy.
- 8.1.2 The Policy will be available on the Council's Intranet.
- 8.1.3 The Policy will be promoted on National Stress Awareness day
- 8.1.4 Promotion of other health and well being related initiatives such as smoking cessation, etc

8.2 Information

Information in the form of a leaflet can be found in Appendix 1 for employees, covering the possible causes and effects of stress and the actions an employee should take, if they consider they may be suffering from stress. It also covers actions individuals may try for themselves, such as relaxation, exercise, diet, being assertive and practicing time management.

8.3 Healthy Lifestyle Scheme

The Council have in place a Healthy Lifestyle Scheme, which promotes and encourages changes to lifestyle through exercise and diet.

For details on how to join the Scheme please contact the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor.

The details of the Scheme are available on the Council's Intranet. (Appendix 2 – registration form to the Council's Healthy Lifestyle Scheme).

9.0 Evaluation, Review and HSE Standards

- 9.1 The Council will undertake audits to gauge staff opinion and the responses to questions, relating to stress will help determine how this policy will be developed in the future.
- 9.2 Any comments or suggestions that employees have with regard to this policy are welcome. Employees can pass on their comments to their manager, the Assistant Director of Human Resources, the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor or to Carecall Counselling Service.
- 9.3 The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has set standards covering the main factors which can lead to work related stress, these are:
 - Demands - are staff able to cope with the demands of the job?
 - Control - do staff have some say in the way they do their work?
 - Support - do staff have adequate information and support?
 - Relationships - are staff subject to unacceptable behaviours eg bullying?
 - Role - do staff understand their role and responsibilities?

- Change - are staff kept informed during periods of organisational change?

Questions in staff surveys will facilitate a comparison against these standards.

10.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

The Policy shall come into effect on 1 October 2007.

The Employer of Choice Group will review the Policy in 18 month's time.

Antrim Borough Council

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF WORK - GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Introduction

This guidance leaflet has been produced to explain what stress is, how it can affect us as individuals and some of the ways in which we can take the stress out of some everyday situations.

Stress is talked about frequently today and it would be easy to think that this is new and that everything in the past was wonderful and that life was easy, the sun always shone and that stress did not exist. In fact, stress has always been a part of life and those who went before us did not have stress free lives. We only have to think about the living conditions people had to endure, the experience of two world wars and the depression to realise that stress is nothing new.

What is stress?

There are many definitions of stress and this is one example: *“Stress is a mental and physical response by an individual to an inappropriate level of pressure whether real or perceived”, (Raymond & Wilson 1999).*

Everyone can in principle experience stress, as no one is immune. Stress is something that can happen when we are in a position where we perceive we cannot cope with the demands facing us. Work-related stress exists when people perceive they cannot cope with what is asked of them, at work.

Stress is very individual. What might be stressful for one person may not be for another. This does not mean that one person is stronger or weaker than the other, but that we are all different. We are all conditioned differently from birth, we have different life experiences, personalities, states of health and we are all unique individuals.

The individual nature of stress

Factors to take account of when considering an individual’s stress response include:

- Personality
- Where they live
- Where they work
- Family
- Lifestyle
- Beliefs
- Education
- Attitude to life etc.

Often, stress occurs due to an individual's expectation of both themselves and others.

The warning signs

The body gives us early warning signs that we may be suffering from stress. These can be likened to the lights showing in a car when there is a problem like low fuel or oil, lights left on etc. In the car we tend not to ignore the warning but, when we are busy, we will ignore our own early warning signs, often to our cost. These signs might include becoming anxious, tearful or withdrawn. Learn to recognise your own warnings and try to adopt some of the coping strategies described here.

Locating the cause of stress

Relax, sit down and list all the issues that are currently causing you concern. It is easy to blame one thing alone when things are going wrong but if you are honest with yourself, there are likely to be many things that are contributing to making you feel as you are.

Try to group these into similar types as there are often links between issues. What originally seemed to be totally unrelated problems may have the same underlying cause. You will not be able to tackle everything on your list at once, but you should be able to work out a plan for dealing with each of them in turn.

Consider the questions 'how do I spend my time' and 'how would I like to spend my time'. It is quite easy when we have too much to do and feeling short of time, to lose sight of the goals we are trying to achieve and end up just muddling through. To prioritise the items on your list, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Is this something I must do?**
- **Is it something I should do? Or**
- **Is it something I would like to do?**

Must means must, should contains options and want is a free choice. Consider situations that waste your time make changes where possible, learn to avoid unnecessary activities, delegate where applicable, schedule time for specific activities.

Rank the problems and deal with some of the smaller ones first, to quickly reduce the list and at the same time reduce your stress.

Try to tackle only one thing at once, consider all possible alternative solutions, including doing nothing and for each solution consider all the pros and cons. Once you decide on a course of action, set yourself realistic targets, or you may only add to your stress.

Doing a small amount of a large task on a regular basis, can make it easier to deal with. Be totally honest with yourself – are your expectations of both

yourself and others too high? Do you actually cause yourself stress by demanding too much of yourself? Make your course of action sensible and reasonable and once devised try to stick to it.

Many of the situations that we have to deal with both at work and in our personal lives cannot be changed, but it is possible to change the way in which we deal with them, or think about them.

Learn to accept the things you cannot change and only spend energy on what would be beneficial to change. We often worry unnecessarily about things we cannot influence, causing ourselves stress and wasting energy that could have been focused elsewhere.

A balanced diet

Change to diet can have beneficial results and can also reduce the effects of stress. Try to eat a balanced diet, always have breakfast, and eat regularly. Research has shown that those people who skip breakfast are often far more tired at the end of the day.

Eat complex carbohydrates such as pasta, wholemeal bread, jacket potatoes etc, rather than refined carbohydrates, (eg. Sweet biscuits, crisps, cake). Complex carbohydrates really can help prevent mood swings.

Avoid too many saturated fats and eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, as increased vitamin C will boost your immune system. Reduce caffeine consumption, avoid drinking alcohol for the wrong reasons and most importantly, drink water to ensure you are not dehydrated. These measures provide very positive steps you can take to help yourself, by replacing bad habits with good habits.

Take time to relax

Ensure you relax when you are not working. When you are suffering from stress, relaxation may be the last item on your priority list, even if it is the top of your wish list.

There are many ways you can help yourself and the simplest, is to separate work from leisure – remember, most of us are not paid to work at home. Having a period of relaxation every day is vital to give yourself time to switch off and recharge. Relaxation is different things to different people but this should be something you enjoy and that fits into your life. This could be reading, watching TV, listening to music, meditation, having a soak in the bath etc. The act of relaxation is a very necessary part of life.

Deep breathing is an excellent way of calming down and can be done anywhere and at any time. Draw in a deep breath whilst thinking 'RE and exhale long and deep whilst thinking LAX'. Even just stop what you are doing and take one DEEP breath. Close your eyes and for a minute or two think of somewhere pleasant.

Control your worries

Keep your worries into perspective. Can you remember what you were worrying about this time last year? Probably not! Many of us waste a lot of time and create a lot of stress for ourselves, worrying about unimportant things in the 'what if' cycle.

Instead of worrying about the 'what if', ask yourself what the probability of that thing actually happening and consider if you are wasting energy on something that may not happen. We all have an inner voice that directs our thoughts or actions and it may be necessary to question what the inner voice tells us. For example if a work colleague snaps at you, your inner voice tells you to snap back whereas if you think about the situation, your colleague may be having a bad day and you will only add to it by snapping back. Is it worth getting worked up about it?

Do not forget that one of the best stress busters is – laughter. Laughing can really help keep your worries and stress at arms length.

Using and soothing your muscles

Often at the end of the working day, exercise is the last thing on your mind. Research has however shown that twenty minutes of exercise, three or four times a week can be very beneficial in managing stress. Individuals report feeling recharged, sleep better and feeling fitter which in turn can build up self-esteem.

Holidays away from work are vital, even if you do not travel further than your home. Make the most of your days off by relaxing and get as far away from your work routine as possible.

A good night's sleep is vital to stay healthy, particularly so in times of stress. Unfortunately, many people experience insomnia when suffering from stress. If this happens to you consider aromatherapy oils, a hot milky drink, or a warm bath before going to bed. Caffeinated drinks can also disturb sleep patterns. Deep breathing and relaxation exercises can also be beneficial, as may gentle exercise such as a short walk. If you can't sleep reading or listening to music can help make you feel sleepy.

Using your time well

Do you miss deadlines or arrive late at meetings? This may be due to the fact that you have too many things to do but it could also be a result of how you manage your time.

Time can be wasted in a variety of ways ie, do you:

- Get side-tracked by unimportant things?
- Stay chatting on the phone after all the important issues have been fully discussed?
- Have trouble delegating?

- Take on just too much?
- Try to do too many tasks at once?
- Go to meetings where there are no formal agendas, let alone positive outcomes?

If any of the above apply to you then here are some suggestions as to what you might do:

- Think of situations where you waste time and how you could alter them
- Learn to drop unimportant activities; learn to say “no” or delegate
- Schedule some time daily when you will not be interrupted
- Have a “to do list” of goals that are really achievable

Learn to say no

Many of us say ‘yes’ when we really want to say ‘no’. It is not always easy to say what we really mean and poor communication is frequently a cause of stress at work.

If you are under a great deal of pressure, you may find yourself being aggressive towards others and similarly, you may find yourself agreeing to do something because it seems the easy, or only, solution. This in turn will make your to do list even longer and increase stress levels as you feel frustrated and annoyed with yourself for making things worse.

Learning to be assertive (not aggressive) can assist with this problem. Assertion is based on a philosophy of personal responsibility and an awareness of the rights of other people. It is all about the ability to negotiate, having the confidence to say what you really want or do not want, but remembering this must not be at the expense of others.

In many work roles we try to oblige and accept tasks without question. It is only when a burden gets unmanageable; we either complain or try to achieve the impossible. When given a task, ask yourself ‘is this really mine?’ If the task is yours but you already have more than you can cope with, talk to your manager before it becomes a problem.

Dealing with Bullying, Harassment and Fear at Work

Bullying and/or harassment can both be possible sources of stress and this type of inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated by the Council.

If you believe that you are being harassed or bullied:

- Make a record of what has been happening and when
- If you feel comfortable, explain to the person that their behaviour is not welcome.
- Look on the Council's Intranet for the Council's Harassment and Bullying Policy

If you do nothing, the stress you are experiencing may get worse.

Some occupations have the potential for both physical and verbal violence and it is important that you share any fears you may have with your manager. Although there will be risk assessments in place covering violence in the workplace, you should ensure that any new risks identified are discussed with your manager and included in the next risk assessment review.

Work versus home life

With the long hours many employees work plus the demands of home, they have less and less time to enjoy being with friends and family, let alone having time for themselves.

Individuals should communicate with those at home and at work to discuss any problems they have and how things might be changed. Often, when an individual is under excessive pressure, they do not tell anyone how they are feeling, leading to them becoming even more frustrated when others add to their problem without being aware.

If you have problems with work-life balance, seek support from your manager or your family and consider any possible alternatives such as job sharing, unpaid leave, flexible working hours etc.

Support

There may be a point in all our lives when we need the help and support of other people. If you ever feel that you just cannot cope any more or are unsure of which way to turn, consider talking your problem over with someone. Your choice of a person to confide in is very important.

If the problem is being caused within the workplace, you could discuss this with a manager, Human Resources Section, the Health Safety and Well Being Advisor, the Council's Staff Counselling Service (Carecall) or your union/safety representative. Close friends and family can be very helpful but do consider they may have problems of their own.

The Staff Counselling Service (*tel.028 9024 5821*) are also there to offer support about home and life issues.

If you feel that your problem is so intimate that you cannot discuss this with any of the above people, you should consider seeking professional help. Your GP could help with this, or you could contact one of the many external agencies who deal with both general and specific issues.

September 2007



Healthy Lifestyle Scheme
Corporate Registration Form



Corporate Membership to the Healthy Lifestyle Scheme is FREE.

The Healthy Lifestyle Scheme aims to support and encourage participation in healthy activities on or before and after work, weekends, by yourself or with family and friends. Activities may also be conducted during working hours, to help you balance your working life.

Just follow a healthy lifestyle and make a commitment to doing healthy activities like walking, swimming or just watching what you eat. Every thing you do will make a difference.

Please complete your personal details below and return as indicated.

Healthy Lifestyle Scheme: Member Commitment

- ❖ I want to make a commitment to join the Healthy Lifestyle Scheme.
- ❖ By making this commitment I will use a sensible approach to healthy eating and engage in physical activity.

I want to enrol in the Scheme now and receive support to reach my goal.

My goal for 2008 is

Name: _____ **Staff No:** _____

Section/Department:

E-mail address

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please return the completed Registration Form to:
Health Safety and Well-Being Advisor, Civic Centre, 50 Stiles Way, Antrim.

Reminder: Have you: -

- 1. Completed a registration form for Activities Programme at the Forum**
- 2. Completed a baseline assessment to identify areas for improvement in your lifestyle**
- 3. Completed a register of interest form, identifying those areas of interest, you would like the Council to obtain further information on or demonstration of for example, which would help you to reach your goal**

For more information on any of the above contact the Health Safety and Well-Being Advisor on ext 1390.

Corporate Registration for Activities Programme at Antrim Forum:

Please complete this form in **BLOCK** letters using **BLACK INK**.

1. Applicant Details:

Personal Details (Applicant)					
Title:		First Name		Surname:	
Date of Birth:	Home Address:		Postcode:		
Mobile No:			Home Tel No:		
Please indicate if you have any special need requirements:					

2. Work (Company Details):

Company Name: Address (inc postcode): Company Contact Name and Position:				
Department:		Staff No:		
<u>Your Work</u> Contact details	Email address		Telephone No:	

3. To complete your Registration:

Photo ID must be taken to the Antrim Forum as proof of identity and workplace along with this completed registration form. A Scheme Membership Card will be issued thereafter. The membership card must be produced on each visit under this scheme.
Please note: There is a cost of £5 to replace any lost or stolen membership card.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Activities Included within the Programme with times and costs:

Activities	1). Swimming and Caribbean Suite: <i>NB: Booking not required for these. These can be subject to exceptional closures. Please contact Antrim Forum for details.</i> 2). Squash, 10 pin bowling, Badminton or 5-a-side football: <i>NB: Bookings are required for these activities. Please contact Antrim Forum Reception to book. Please note Charges are also made for bookings not cancelled within 24 hours.</i> 3). Active Lifestyles Programmes (*times for this may be outside of those indicated). Details of these programmes are always circulated. 4) See attached flyer with latest additions to Scheme as at May 2007.		
Times:	8am-10am	12pm-2pm	4pm-6pm
Costs:	£1 per session per person		

Office use only:

AF: Issued Card – Date _____
Registration Form returned from AF and Filed in Human Resources: _____

