



# SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

## STRESS MANAGEMENT POLICY

### AIMS OF THE POLICY

This policy applies to all Town Council employees. The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness and understanding of stress, and to set out how to try and prevent, reduce and supportively manage stress.

Shrewsbury Town Council recognises work related pressure and stress as an important health and safety issue.

The Town Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its employees by introducing and promoting policies to encourage healthier lifestyles and to fulfilling its health and safety duties by reducing the causes of work-related pressure and stress.

This will be achieved by working with employees to minimise stress in the workplace and through working with individuals affected by stress, whether work related or of a personal nature, to mitigate the adverse effects of stress.

### SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The Town Council's goals and values set out the commitment to treat all employees and customers with dignity and respect. This policy on stress management incorporates and reflects this in terms of focussing and promoting effective management practice and ensuring high standards of health and safety.

The Town Council recognises that stress can have an adverse effect on employee well-being which can lead to reduced performance or ill health. This will in turn may an impact on the Town Council's ability to deliver services and achieve its goals.

The Town Council is committed to reducing stress so far as is reasonably practicable, by encouraging a supportive environment where excessive pressures on an individual are addressed thereby enhancing performance.

The Town Council acknowledges the role of managers in achieving this objective and undertakes to make available information and guidance concerning stress awareness and the management of stress so they can fulfil their responsibilities towards the employees for whom they are accountable.

### POLICY OBJECTIVES

- To promote wellbeing through proactive and supportive management of work-related stress
- To increase the general awareness and understanding of the causes of work-related stress.
- To encourage colleagues to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and to engage with the support that is available.
- To address work related factors which might contribute to excessive undue pressure at work, which may have led or lead to stress related illness.
- To promote a culture and environment where stress is mitigated as far as possible, is acknowledged without stigma and colleagues feel comfortable in talking about the support they need.

### PRINCIPLES

Ensuring that all employees who experience both health and stress related problems are treated fairly, sensitively, with respect and in accordance with the Town Council's Equal Opportunities policy. The Town

Council will aim to promote a positive and preventative rather than punitive approach. The Town Council will consult with Trade Union Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of ill health, stress and mental health problems. Open communication will be encouraged and promoted. The Town Council will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.

## **WHAT IS STRESS?**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as: 'The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.' While some degree of pressure and demand is to be expected in the workplace to ensure the efficient running and productivity of the Town Council, there are factors that can lead to employees feeling excessive pressure and if not properly managed, these can lead to increased sickness, anxiety, depression or other mental ill-health.

The HSE also emphasises that it is important not to medicalise stress, as stress is a state, not an illness; however, if mismanaged it can lead to the development of mental and physical illnesses. They also acknowledge the difference between pressure and stress. Pressure can be positive and a motivating factor and is often essential in a job. It can help us achieve our goals and perform better. Stress occurs when this pressure becomes excessive. Stress is a natural reaction to too much pressure but is never positive.

### **Examples Of Where Stress Can Occur in the Workplace:**

- Pressures pile on top of each other and are prolonged
- Inadequate level of knowledge and skills, training or resources for the job
- Type of job or work environment such as dealing with the public who may be in distress or needing help or poor physical conditions such as excessive heat, noise, humidity, bad lighting or lack of space
- Excessive, conflicting, inconsistent or inflexible work demands
- Working long hours
- Working long hours without taking appropriate breaks e.g. working through lunch
- Uncertainty or inability to exert any control over work objectives, job or career prospects
- Work schedules are perceived as inflexible and over demanding
- Prolonged conflict such as where an individual is facing bullying and harassment, or lack of social integration with managers/colleagues
- Lack of leadership support or recognition
- Inadequate or unreliable equipment
- Lack of assertiveness and poor time-management skills
- Inadequate feedback or inappropriate communications from managers/colleagues
- Inappropriate communication between staff and Councillors or no communication at all.

Stress both inside and outside work can affect our wellbeing. We can experience excessive pressure and demands outside work, which can also contribute to how we are at work. Stress tends to build up over time because of a combination of factors that may not all be work related. Conflicting demands at work and home can lead to excessive stress. Often home and work lives are so interwoven that it may not be possible to identify any single cause of stress.

It should be recognised that people react to issues differently and assumptions should not be made about a person's ability to cope under pressure whether work related or otherwise. Our Vivup assistance programme is a free and confidential service available for all colleagues and is there to provide support regardless of the causes of stress. You are actively encouraged to take advantage of the support that is available for you whenever you need it.

## **Legal Obligation**

All employers have a legal duty to care for their staff. Under health and safety legislation, injury to mental health is treated in the same way as injury to physical health.

The legal duty to protect the health of workers, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, applies equally to the control of stress caused or made worse by work.

People with substantial and long-term mental impairment which may have arisen or been made worse because of stress, are also protected under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

### **The Town Council Recognises That:**

- Anyone can suffer from stress
- Stress is not an illness, but the natural adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure and demands imposed on them
- Ill-health can often be due to problems outside work which may then affect the employee's performance at work
- Individuals who are suffering from stress for whatever reason, must have support and access to help
- Stress over a significant time period can contribute to physical and mental ill-health

### **What We Will Do**

Line managers have a duty to assess the impact of workload allocations but individual staff members are also responsible for keeping their line manager informed of any issues which could impact on their performance. In addition:

- We will identify workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress
- We will regularly review all risk assessments
- We will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in the management of stress
- We will monitor stress
- We will provide initiatives which have various health benefits and may help to reduce stress and help staff relax
- We will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress
- We will check in with staff who have previously reported work-based stress

### **Monitoring Stress**

Taking action to reduce stress can result in better health, reduced sickness absence, increased performance and output, better working relationships and lower staff turnover.

*The Deputy Town Clerk will monitor stress levels within the Council by looking at:*

- Long- and short-term sickness absence levels relating to stress
- Stress related ill-health retirement
- Staff turnover rates
- Accident statistics
- Feedback from exit interviews
- Staff surveys

## **Raising Awareness**

The Town Council recognises the need to ensure that all employees are aware of the policy. We will implement a strategy of education and awareness raising in terms of employee health and welfare as well as the recognition of stress symptoms and the management of stress.

## **IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF STRESS**

### **Signs and Symptoms of Stress**

It is important to pay attention to both yourself and your colleagues, so that if you notice signs that a person maybe feeling stressed you can provide or seek appropriate support.

Stress can have many different causes, and signs of stress can take different forms. Every member of staff needs to understand how to recognise stress, how it arises and what to do about it.

### **What to look for in others?**

Some people show an acute reaction to excess pressure. In others the symptoms may appear over time and may be mistaken for other health problems. The key factor to look for is any **significant changes** in behaviour.

### **What to be aware of in yourself?**

The key issue in managing your own stress is self-awareness. For example, moodiness and irritability may be signs of stress, or you may be naturally moody and irritable! The key issue to note is changes to your normal behaviour or patterns of health, for example are your mood swings greater than usual? Are you experiencing more headaches than usual? Appendix B gives a full list which you can use as a self-awareness check list.

### **Causes of stress**

Stress can have many different causes or stressors, both at work and outside it. Some people can cope well. Others, with the same stressors, depending on personality and circumstances, cannot cope.

Stressors at home may well effect those at work and vice-versa. People with a previous history of mental ill health are not at any greater risk than others, indeed their experience may make them better able to cope. However, as you cannot be sure how anyone will react you should take care over someone who has already suffered illness through stress. (See Appendix A for list of typical stressors).

The Town Council is committed to reducing stress so far as is practicable, but it is accepted that some degree of pressure occurs in most jobs. Each job brings its own set of tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day challenges. These challenges provide structure, improve motivation and are the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.

It must be recognised that the ability to deal with challenges is not limitless and that stress is the physical, emotional and behavioural response to an inappropriate level of pressure.

The cost to the Council can be measured in terms of absenteeism, poor motivation and high staff turnover. This can contribute to rising stress levels for other colleagues.

## **EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES**

All members of staff have a responsibility to themselves and their colleagues to take action to minimise or eliminate stress in the workplace. This includes taking steps to minimise their own stress, and to modify their behaviour when it is causing stress to others.

Staff should let their line managers know of concerns or worries, related to their work, which are causing excessive pressure and may adversely affect their health or their ability to perform their duties safely and effectively. In the interests of their own health and welfare and that of their colleagues, action can then be taken.

There are inevitably times in our lives where excessive pressure may lead to stress. It is important that you are aware of the signs and symptoms so that you can actively engage with the right support for you.

- You are encouraged to discuss any concerns, issues or support you need with your line manager, a colleague or a member of the senior management team.
- If you are a member of a Trade Union, you can also speak to your TU representative. Any concerns you raise will be handled in a supportive and sympathetic way;
- If you feel able to, it is important for you to speak to your line manager or a colleague if you feel stressed, regardless as to whether that stress has been caused from situations at work or home;
- Cooperate with referrals to occupational health and participate in counselling when recommended by a health professional.
- You are encouraged to investigate health and wellbeing opportunities and look after your physical and mental health; Remember you can also seek support from your GP.
- Recognise the importance of taking your annual leave which can support your overall wellbeing.
- When appropriate, make use of the free confidential services available to you from the Vivup programme, provided by the Council.

A risk assessment tool is available for line managers at Risk Assessment for Work Related Stress. A copy of this is available from the HR Team.

#### **OTHER SOURCES OF HELP AVAILABLE**

UNISON Stress at Work Guide <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/10/On-line-Catalogue227032.pdf>

UNISON Risk Assessment Guide <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/07/On-line-Catalogue221002.pdf>

TUC Brown Book <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/BrownBook2015.pdf>

HSE Stress Micro-Site <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>

HSE Stress Indicator Tool <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/indicatortool.pdf>

HSE Stress Indicator Tool Manual <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/indicatortoolmanual.pdf>

HSE Stress Analysis Tool <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/analysistool.xls>

<b>Approved by Personnel Committee</b>	<b>7 December 2023</b>
<b>Adopted by Council</b>	
<b>Review Date</b>	

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Typical stressors

An individual's stress may be due to issues within the workplace or attitudes at work. While there are some jobs that may seem to be more 'stressful' than others, no job is 'inherently stressful'. We are all individuals with our own unique personality; and so, we will all respond to stressors differently.

The stressors checklist below are not in any order of priority. The purpose of this checklist is to help you identify what may be contributing to your own or someone else's stress levels. Remember that experiencing one or more stressors does not automatically lead to the experience of stress. When looking at workplace stress it is possible that there will be a range of individual and different responses to the same stressors. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive and there could be many other potential stressors both within and outside of the workplace. The purpose of the list is to give some idea of issues that line managers might need to consider.

Non Work	Work Based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Personal stress events (such as loss, separation, divorce, bereavement)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Changes in living arrangements (moving house)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social isolation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Long distance travel/commuting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ill health</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of support at home (family pressures, conflicting, demands of work and home)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Caring responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Management and style of organisation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of organisational objectives and values</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor communication</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of consultation or involvement in change</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of management support</li> </ul>
<b>Role in Organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unclear</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting lines of management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Conflicting objectives and responsibilities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> High level of responsibility for people</li> </ul>	<b>Career</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Career uncertainty</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Threat of redundancy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of recognition</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Frustration of career ambitions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient training</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring of roles.</li> </ul>
<b>Decision making or control</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Low participation in decision making</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of control over work</li> </ul>	<b>Relationships at work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Social or physical isolation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor relationships with peers or managers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Harassment and bullying</li> </ul>
<b>Job and workplace design</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Boring or repetitive work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Constant dealing with peoples problems or complaints</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fear of technology or responsibility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of competence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Significant risks to health or safety</li> </ul>	<b>Workload</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of control over amount and/or pace of work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lack of prioritisation</li> </ul>
<b>Work schedule</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unpredictable peak loads</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inflexible or over-burdensome work schedule</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unpredictable and/or unsocial work hours</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Shift working</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Excessive overtime</li> </ul>	

## Appendix B

### What might stress look like?

Listed are the possible signs or indicators of stress that managers or staff may recognise at an early stage.

Remember, it is **significant changes** in patterns or behaviour that may indicate an individual is stressed.

The list gives possible indicators and symptoms of stress which people may experience from any cause – home, work, personal life or any combination of these. Excess pressure does not automatically result in ill health. It is only when the pressures are intense and continue for some time that the effects of stress can cause harm.

Everyone needs to be aware of possible changes in themselves which may alone, or with other changes, indicate stress. The following information could be given to staff to raise their awareness of physical and emotional changes which may indicate they are at risk of, or actually suffering from, stress.

#### **Possible signs and symptoms of stress.**

The following information is intended as a self-awareness sheet.

Please take time to consider whether you have recently begun to experience any of the following conditions.

#### **Physical signs.**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> headaches      | <input type="checkbox"/> skin irritation or rashes           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tension        | <input type="checkbox"/> frequent colds and minor infections |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tearfulness    | <input type="checkbox"/> constipation or diarrhoea           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tiredness      | <input type="checkbox"/> rapid weight gain or loss           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> restlessness   | <input type="checkbox"/> susceptibility to allergies         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> indigestion    | <input type="checkbox"/> fainting                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> palpitations   | <input type="checkbox"/> nausea                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> breathlessness | <input type="checkbox"/> chest pains                         |

#### **Emotional signs**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger or irritability | <input type="checkbox"/> loss of confidence       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety               | <input type="checkbox"/> no motivation            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nervousness           | <input type="checkbox"/> no job satisfaction      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apprehension          | <input type="checkbox"/> reduced self esteem      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moodiness             | <input type="checkbox"/> sensitivity to criticism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness            |   |

### **Behavioural changes**

- ☹️ unsociability
- ☹️ loss of appetite or overeating
- ☹️ disturbed sleep
- ☹️ drinking more alcohol
- ☹️ smoking more
- ☹️ taking more work home
- ☹️ too busy to relax
- ☹️ unable to relax
- ☹️ low productivity
- ☹️ accident prone
- ☹️ voice tremor
- ☹️ reduced sex drive
- ☹️ withdrawn

### **Intellectual signs**

- ☹️ difficulty in making decisions
- ☹️ memory lapses or errors
- ☹️ inability to concentrate
- ☹️ bad dreams, nightmares
- ☹️ worrying
- ☹️ making mistakes
- ☹️ less intuitive
- ☹️ hasty decisions
- ☹️ less sensitive
- ☹️ muddled thinking

If you are experiencing one or more of these problems for a sustained period, it is important you get support. You can talk about this in confidence to your manager, the HR team, a member of the senior management team, a trade union representative, counselling services available via Vivup or your family doctor.