STRESS POLICY

Title	Stress Policy
Who should use this	All Staff
Author	SAC/Adapted by AVJB
Approved by Management Team	20 February 2018
Approved by Joint Board	N/A – Existing Policy
Reviewer	**Office Manager**
Review Date	**February 2021**

Review History

REVIEW NO.	DETAILS	RELEASE DATE
1	All references to "AVJB directory" have been amended to "SharePoint".	FEBRUARY 2015
2	REVIEWED – REMOVAL OF REFERENCE TO EXIT INTERVIEWS WITHIN MONITORING – PAGE 8.	FEBRUARY 2018
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POLICY

Policy Statement

Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board is committed to providing a positive working environment and aims to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees.

Accordingly, the Board operates a range of policies and procedures which together aim to provide a positive framework that contributes to the well-being of its employees.

The Board acknowledges that a great number of factors in both working and domestic lives can potentially create negative pressure on the individual. Today, these pressures are more commonly known as 'Stress'. The extent to which we are affected by these pressures is dependent on how we react to them.

The Board acknowledges that this can also be a contributory cause of employee ill-health, manifesting itself in both mental and physical effects leading to altered workplace behaviour. Ultimately, where significant effects are experienced, this may result in the employee being unable to attend work.

To this end, our aim is to attempt the reduced likelihood of such occurrences and to provide appropriate and positive support mechanisms.

The Board gives its commitment to support its employees through reasonable practical support, irrespective of the "contributory cause" of "negative pressures or stressors".

All employees are expected to take personal responsibility and take reasonable steps, remain vigilant and act promptly to address the indications of 'negative pressure'.

What is Stress?

The term 'stress' is used to describe an individual's response to pressure, it is the adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressure and other types of demands placed upon them.

The response can be physiological and/or behavioural. What may be perceived as significant to one person may not be significant to another. Often the response may be to internalise the stress. How the individual responds to the stressor will depend on their personality, their perceptions and their past experience. Some pressure is necessary in that it assists us in achieving both work and personal goals. However, too much pressure can make those goals harder to achieve. An employee's ability to cope with increasing workplace stress is also affected by the amount of stress they are subjected to outside of the workplace.

Managers need to be aware that Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board may, in certain circumstances, be held accountable, if, after being made aware that a genuine work related stress problem exists, it fails, or makes no reasonable attempt, to resolve the problems.

Positive action is encouraged by all employees through the adoption of this policy, which will be backed up by appropriate systems, resources and review mechanisms.

Management Aims and Objectives

Our aims and objectives are to:

- Develop strategies and appropriate action plans to work towards a healthy organisation therefore reducing costs associated with ill-health and absenteeism.

- Comply with statutes and enhance good practice to improve employee morale and contribute to performance improvement.

- Raise awareness of the issues and support mechanisms available through the provision of relevant information to employees and managers on the identification of stress and contributory causes.

- Promote a positive culture that is free of any stigma associated with such illness and which positively encourages employees to seek help at the earliest stage.

- Ensure commitment to this policy to ensure effective implementation.

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

Sources of Organisational Stress

There are six main areas in which occupational stress can occur.

Factors which are:

1. intrinsic to the occupation itself, e.g., working environment, public interface
2. intrinsic to the employee's role within the organisation,
3. associated with interpersonal relationships,
4. associated with career structure and opportunities for advancement,
5. associated with trust in the organisation and the motivation of employees,
6. associated with the interface between home and work.

Examples of the signs and symptoms of stress are included in the Board's information guides for managers and employees which are designed to help deal with potentially stressful situations. These booklets are available on SharePoint or from the Board's Personnel Representatives and South Ayrshire Council's Occupational Health.

Control Methods

Managers

It is not a manager's responsibility to diagnose whether an employee is suffering from stress, however, if they notice changes in an employee's behaviour it could be due to stress.

Once a manager becomes aware that an employee is exhibiting signs of stress, they should take urgent action to address the issue. How a stress situation is managed will influence whether absence may result, the length of an employee's absence and any consequent costs. If no effort is made to intervene early and resolve issues, especially if the employee takes time off, the more difficult it may be to resolve.

Early intervention can include conflict resolution, mediation, reviewing and making changes to workload or counselling. But more importantly, a manager should try to understand why an employee is responding to a certain stressor in a way that is causing harm. It will be the manager's response to the employee's stress that will be a critical factor in successfully resolving the problem. Managers will be responsible for putting appropriate measures in place to remove, alleviate or minimise the cause of the stress or assist the employee, where appropriate, in dealing with the issues believed to be causing the stress.

Managers should ensure they are aware of any absence patterns or changes in an employee's behaviour or health which may be stress related. Such warning signs are pivotal and should never be ignored.

It is also important that managers are aware of what they can and cannot do when supporting employees suffering from stress. Some problems need the support or attention of qualified experts, particularly where stress is the result of a traumatic situation, e.g., a major disaster, fire or fatal incident, work place attack, serious assault or witnessing a violent incident, where it will be crucial to refer employees for expert help when this is more appropriate. Please seek advice from the Board's Personnel Representatives or from South Ayrshire Council's Occupational Health Team.

Board policies and procedures which may be relevant and helpful to any issues raised by the employee are available on SharePoint or from the Board's Personnel Representatives.

Performance and Development Reviews

The Performance and Development Review Process can be used to identify work related training and development needs, workload issues and effective means of prioritising and organising work activity and time management. It is important that managers know their employees and their strengths and weaknesses.

Respect at Work

Act immediately to confront bullying or other harassment by following the Board's Respect at Work Policy and Procedures. Bullying and harassment interferes with job performance, creates stress at work, leads to illness and increased absenteeism and therefore will not be tolerated.

Absence Management

It is essential that the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board's Managing Absence and Improving Attendance Policy is strictly adhered to, in order that early intervention and treatment can be considered if necessary.

Grievances

It is essential that employees have a positive mechanism with which to put forward their personal issues so that these can be discussed in a controlled and constructive manner. Please refer to the Board's policy Dealing with Grievances.

Recruitment, Selection and Induction Training

Effective application of the above and their associated procedures will ensure that potential Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board employees are made fully aware of the nature of the job for which they are applying and it's associated pressures.

As part of the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board recruitment and induction process, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined – including the job description. Should an employee require any explanation of this, advice should be sought through line management. Clarifying ambiguities in this regard may reduce the risk of a stress response.

Support Mechanisms

Employee Information Sources

Relevant information will be distributed to employees by posting on the AVJB directory to provide awareness, highlighting support mechanisms available and how to access these services in a discrete manner.

The Board's Personnel Representatives/ Trade Union Representatives

The Board's Personnel Representatives and Trade Union Representatives will be happy to provide advice and support on handling a stress related problem; this will be done in the strictest confidence. In some cases it will be recognised that more specialist advice and guidance from healthcare professionals is required to deal with a particular situation or to support an individual employee.

Counselling

Access to counselling services is available through contact with the Board's Personnel Representatives or Occupational Health Services by management referral. Counselling is also available through Health Services and can be accessed through an employee's G.P.

Occupational Health

The Board has professional health support through the provision of South Ayrshire Council's Occupational Health Service.

The Occupational Health Team will play a major role in advising on the development of positive initiatives that are aimed at promoting good health amongst Board employees. They will achieve this by working closely with South Ayrshire Council's Corporate Human Resources and the Board's Personnel Representatives to identify actions required.

Training & Employee Development

An inability to cope with specific work activity is often cited as a stress hazard. Managers should ensure that all employees are adequately trained and have the necessary skills for the post. Managers may also require training in people management skills as their own management style may create a stressful environment for their employees.

The Board provides a range of training and employee development opportunities in order to assist all employees through the provision of knowledge, skills and experience. Discussion should be undertaken between employees and line managers about the relevance and availability of these opportunities. The Board's Personnel Representatives and South Ayrshire Council's Corporate HR Employee Development Team can also provide support and advice in this area.

Health and Safety

South Ayrshire Council's Health and Safety Team will be happy to provide advice and guidance on this issue including some of the practical solutions required for example, relating to physical work environment.

Managing Change

There are specific procedures in place to support employees during any period of redeployment as a result of Managing Change. For more information please refer to the Managing Change Policy.

Monitoring

A range of measures can be used to give an indication of the 'environmental temperature'. These include:

- Detailed sickness absence monitoring.

- Monitoring of grievances, respect at work incidents, violence at work incidents, work place accidents or injury, redeployments, utilisation of employee surveys, performance management discussions, referrals to occupational health – employee or management lead, disciplinary cases.

The Board takes such monitoring seriously. The Board will ensure that the appropriate systems are in place to support the monitoring and recording of this information. Regular reporting will be undertaken and results published, in order to maintain a keen focus on such issues, whilst raising and maintaining awareness.

Responsibilities

The Board should monitor it's workplace and may use a number of means at its disposal to measure the extent of the problem. Particular areas to look at are those detailed above under Monitoring.

If, having looked at the above indicators, it is believed that there may be certain stressors in a work environment/activity that are causing problems, the Board should ensure that a programme of stress risk assessment is considered in a generic way in the first instance, with an examination of the type of stress hazards that are indicative of the specific work activity.

A risk assessment toolkit is available to assist in this process, a small pilot exercise is recommended in the first instance and the Board may wish to work in association with and guidance from South Ayrshire Council's Corporate HR, Health and Safety and Occupational Health to carry out this task.

Managers

We all have the potential to suffer ill health as a result of stress - depending on the pressure we are under at any given time.

Some individuals can be more vulnerable than others and, for the purposes of health and safety, an employer has a duty of care towards employees.

It is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure they that they have all the information available to them with regard to internal and external support mechanisms.

The manager will provide a vital link between the employee, who may be suffering from the adverse effects of stress, and the facilities available to assist that employee. Please refer to the following information "Reducing Stress at Work Guidance for Managers" and "Dealing with Stress Information for Employees" which are available on SharePoint or from the Board's Personnel Representatives.

Employees

Employees should know how to call upon support from their managers and colleagues and are encouraged to seek support at an early stage if they feel as though they are unable to cope. Further information for employees is contained within the Board's "Dealing with Stress Information for Employees" booklet available on SharePoint or from the Board's Personnel Representatives.

Legislation

Employment policy and practice is governed through related employment legislation. This is developed and amended on a continuing basis as a result of European Directives and/or, as a result of EAT cases.

The Board commitment includes working within relevant legislative context as may be amended from time to time.

South Ayrshire Council's Human Resources have developed internal partnerships with Legal Services in order to monitor the external environment and maintain relevant information sources in order to develop compliant policy and procedures that will be adopted and utilised by the Board.