



**General Purposes Committee  
29 January 2015**

**Report from the  
HR Director**

**Stress Policy**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides details of the proposed new Stress Policy. When developing the new policy, the opportunity has been taken to provide clearer guidance to all staff on the symptoms of stress and to expand the policy to cover all stress whether potentially work related or not. The policy make clear that not all stress necessarily impacts negatively on wellbeing, and that employees and managers must take active responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

**2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 GP Committee is asked to:
- a) approve the new stress policy; and
  - b) authorise the HR Director in consultation with the Chief Executive and then consultation with the relevant trade unions, to make such other changes as may be necessary from time to time to the policy to ensure it remains 'fit for purpose'.

**3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 Currently, Brent has a 'Workplace Stress' policy. This policy is overly lengthy and is no longer fit for purpose. Specifically, it does not account for individuals who develop stress or show symptoms of stress due to external factors taking place outside of the work environment, nor does it provide advice and guidance for managers and staff on how best to deal with colleagues who may be experiencing stress.
- 3.2 The new policy clarifies that stress – regardless of its cause – can be detrimental to staff health and wellbeing and must therefore be recognised and managed according to the procedures outlined within the policy.

- 3.3 However, the new policy does not assume that all staff experiencing stress will be absent from work nor that all stress has a negative influence on health and wellbeing. It emphasises the role of good management practice in minimising instances of negative stress affecting employee health and wellbeing, and clarifies that managers have a fundamental responsibility to ensure their practices are in line with the stress-reducing practices outlined in the policy.
- 3.4 The new policy offers guidance on how to recognise stress in colleagues, and outlines some common symptoms and signs of stress. It alerts staff to the possible links between stress and alcohol or substance misuse as recommended in the Healthy Workplace Charter's gold standards.
- 3.5 The new policy clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including Human Resources, employees and managers. It makes clear that employees have a responsibility to manage stress and seek support if necessary. The policy sets out clear procedures for managers when dealing with employees whom they suspect may be experiencing negative stress or may be at risk of developing stress related symptoms.
- 3.6 The new policy outlines that certain areas may show higher incidences of stress and that the council should be aware of and monitor any potential 'stress hotspots'. This is again in line with the Healthy Workplace Charter gold standard guidelines.
- 3.7 The new policy streamlines the risk assessment processes, stating that a risk assessment to identify workplace stressors should be incorporated into the standard risk assessment processes.
- 3.8 As with all the council's policies and procedures the new policy is designed to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and receive the support they require in order to carry out their roles effectively.
- 3.9 HR has consulted with HR Improvement Group and the Trade Unions on the new Stress Policy. Both groups provided positive feedback and their comments were incorporated into the policy where appropriate. The policy has also been approved by CMT.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising as a result of changes made to the policy.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The council's health and wellbeing policies are underpinned by its duty to abide by section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HASWA). This policy is compliant with all legal and legislative requirements.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 The policy is applicable to all staff and provides a consistent approach to managing stress in the workplace. No one group of staff with a shared protected characteristic should be disproportionately affected by the policy and it will be monitored to ensure this is the case. An equalities analysis is being undertaken to ensure that all diversity implications are considered.

## **7.0 Staffing Implications**

The Stress Policy will provide clear guidance to all staff on recognising and responding to stress. Managing stress effectively will improve employee wellbeing and should contribute to greater productivity, lower staff turnover and fewer leaves of absence.

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Contact Officer**

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