



Our People

Your safety

HOW DO I DEAL WITH STRESS?

SUPPORT FOR STAFF



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Epping Forest
District Council

OUR APPROACH TO DEALING WITH STRESS

At Epping Forest District Council we value our staff and aim to support you in providing services to our customers. We do this in a number of ways, including the following.

- We provide training and development opportunities to help you do your job better and develop your career.
- We review the ways we communicate with you to improve the flow of information.
- We aim to create a working environment where any stress experienced by staff is reduced in a positive and supportive way.

This guidance tells you what support is available if you are finding it difficult to cope with any aspect of your working life. We recognise that pressures outside of work can affect how well you cope with your job. Our approach is to offer a range of initiatives and resources to help you, together with speedy access to specialist advice if you need this.

ISSUES TO THINK ABOUT IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING STRESS

The experience of stress can affect the way we think, feel and behave, and can also cause physical symptoms.

Stress can cause a range of short-term physical or mental health symptoms and changed behaviour.

Signs of Stress

Physical symptoms: headaches; respiratory infections; raised heart rate; menstrual problems; back pain; gastro-intestinal problems; and skin or sleep disorders.

Psychological symptoms: irritability; depression; and anxiety.

Changed behaviour: increased use of tobacco; alcohol or drugs; increased accident rates; eating disorders; social withdrawal; aggression; difficulty concentrating or remembering things; poor decision making; inability to switch off; loss of creativity; working long hours; and an increased number of errors.

When people experience stress over long periods they may develop other signs, for example high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, anxiety or long term depression.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms you should take action. Here are some ideas to help you.

Your job

It is a fact of modern life that all our jobs are busy, and are often pressurised. Some degree of pressure is a normal part of life and does not have a bad effect on our health. However, problems can occur if the pressure becomes excessive or continues over a long period of time.

As individuals, we have different ways of coping with pressure, and different levels of tolerance. Stress is an excess of pressure that you are unable to cope with. If you are experiencing stress-related difficulties at work, it often helps to think about how you do your job.

Could you do your work in a different way, perhaps so that you can plan better for peaks and troughs? Talk to your manager about this, as he or she may have a better idea of what is going on throughout the team, and be able to suggest some changes.

Sometimes stress can be 'self inflicted' by conscientious staff who set themselves targets which are too challenging or demanding. Think about how you structure your day, your working hours and lunch break.

We have a flexible working hours scheme, and there may be scope for you to change your working pattern to fit in with domestic commitments (subject, of course, to the needs of your team).

Work Outside the Council

The 'Working Time Regulations 1998' introduced a number of measures to make sure you do not work excessive hours. Therefore, you must tell your manager if you have a second job, outside the Council. This is so that you do not work too many hours, which might affect your health and safety. You must have permission from your manager to carry out work which might conflict with your job with the Council. Finally, if you are paid on spinal column point 26 or higher you must seek permission for any outside work you want to do. Please see the Staff Handbook for more information (Working for the Community).

Your workplace

Sometimes stress is caused by poor office layout or working conditions. It is not always possible to resolve issues about space, due to the physical constraints of buildings, but it is often helpful to look at whether you have the right office equipment to do your job properly, including a suitable chair and desk. You should discuss any concerns with your manager, or speak to your safety representative or the Safety Officer for advice on these matters.

Issues outside work

Stress may be caused by issues outside work, for example a relationship breakdown, a death, caring for elderly relatives, the arrival of a new baby or financial difficulties. These problems can affect our work as well as our home life. It can be useful to spend some time looking at your overall priorities – this is often called 'work/life balance'. If you have recently taken on new caring responsibilities, either with a



child or perhaps an elderly adult, it may be useful to think about a period of part time working or job sharing (if your job can be organised in this way).

Whilst your personal life is your own responsibility, and a private matter, it is important to recognise the effect this can have on your work. A number of ideas are given below to help with this.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

We recognise that everyone is an individual, and experiences stress in different ways. Equally, the solutions to stress will not be the same for everyone so, rather than taking one overall approach to managing stress, we have provided a range of options for you to consider.

Who to Contact for Advice

Your first point of contact in tackling stress is to talk to your line manager. You can also speak to the Human Resources Team, your trade union or the Safety Officer. The important thing is to take action as quickly as possible.

The Role of Your Manager

If you are experiencing stress, it is important to talk about your concerns with your manager, rather than carry on in silence. This should usually be your first step in tackling stress, unless you feel you need to deal with it in another way.

We offer training to managers on how to recognise and address issues of stress within their team. Your manager is often the best person to help if you are having difficulties with your job, or you feel it could be better designed to enable you to work more efficiently. He or she will be able to deal with matters in a confidential and professional way, and provide advice and support. Sometimes the things that make you worry are not as important as you thought.

Materials in the Open Learning Resource Centre

Here you will find a number of self-help books, CDs, relaxation tapes and videos about dealing with stress. They are provided to help you, so please feel free to borrow or browse through them. If you want to borrow them, please speak to the Human Resources Team, who are responsible for keeping them up to date and lending them out.

Information and Awareness Sessions run by the Occupational Health Service

The Council's Occupational Health Service runs short health screening sessions for individuals, where basic checks are carried out on blood pressure and body weight. These are free to staff, but places are limited and should be booked through Human Resources.

The Employee Counselling Service

If you feel that you need to spend time discussing any specific difficulties with a trained counsellor, Human Resources can arrange this for you. The Council will pay for a maximum of five sessions, which take place on a confidential basis. If you need more sessions than this your Director or you will need to pay a fee.

The Workplace Chaplaincy

Workplace Chaplains make regular visits to the Council Offices. If you would like to talk to one of them, their visiting timetable and their contact details are available on the door of the Open Learning Resources Centre.

Personal Advice from the Occupational Health Service

We use the Occupational Health Service to gain medical advice on employees who are away from work on sick leave. The service provides information on how we can support staff when they return to work.

You can also refer yourself to the service on a confidential basis. If you need specific health advice to help you with your work. It is sometimes useful to do this if you need to discuss any medical condition with a qualified occupational health practitioner. If you feel this would be helpful, please speak to Human Resources.

Your Own Doctor (General Practitioner)

Your GP keeps details of your medical history, and will be able to offer you advice, which is important if you have a specific medical condition. They can sometimes offer referrals to specialists if this is necessary, or may recommend a short break from work. This is sometimes all that is needed to put any difficulties in context, leaving you feeling much better when you return.

Leisure Facilities at District Sports Centres

Health professionals recognise the importance of regular exercise as a means of combating stress and staying healthy. There are a range of high quality fitness facilities in the district which you can use at a discounted rate. Please contact Epping Leisure Centre, Loughton Leisure Centre, Ongar Leisure Centre or Waltham Abbey Swimming Pool for further details. Lunchtime 'Walking For Health' events are also organised. Please contact Sports Development for further details.

OTHER HELP WE OFFER

Learning and Development Opportunities

We run a full range of training courses for staff, with the aim of equipping you to do your job better. The programme includes topics such as assertiveness, stress management and time management. These are all important aspects of managing stress effectively. Details of the programme are available from the Human Resources Team. We can also arrange confidential one-to-one sessions where you can discuss your job and career aspirations.

The Harassment and Bullying Policy

If you feel that you are being harassed or bullied by your manager, a customer, a councillor or by work colleagues you should raise this with them first. It is always better to talk through differences or misunderstandings, rather than let them fester. However, there are times when this is difficult to do, and you may find that you need to raise matters more formally. You may wish to think about whether the Harassment and Bullying Policy could help you, particularly if informal approaches have failed. We suggest that you seek advice before taking this step, and your trade union or the Human Resources Team will be able to provide this.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

At Epping Forest District Council we value the contribution of all our employees. We seek to create an environment where individuals can flourish, and where respect for others is encouraged. You should expect your work to be carried out in an environment which is free from discrimination and where each persons' contribution counts. Everyone has a role to play in this, both managers and staff, by keeping to the policy and making sure that behaviour is free from discriminatory practice.