Employee Mental Health Policy

This policy was agreed at the Partnership & Performance Committee on 22nd November 2018.

1. Policy Statement

1.1 Clackmannanshire Council is committed to ensuring the health and welfare of employees. This includes their mental as well as physical health. The Council recognises its responsibilities under the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulations and the Equality Act in this regard.

2. Introduction

2.1 Mental health and wellbeing is an important aspect of overall health and wellbeing and can be affected by different factors, including life events such as relationship breakdowns, bereavement, workplace pressures and mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety. The National Health Service (NHS) describes mental wellbeing and mental illness as follows:

Mental Wellbeing - Definitions of mental wellbeing generally include aspects such as: life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem, mastery and feeling in control, having purpose in life, and a sense of belonging and support.

Mental Illness - Mental illness refers to a diagnosable condition or personality disorder that significantly interferes with an individual's cognitive, emotional or social abilities eg depression, anxiety, schizophrenia. The International Classification of Diseases ICD 10, Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive list of recognised mental and behavioural disorders.

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. It arises when they perceive that they are unable to cope with those demands'.

2.2. Although it can be healthy for people to experience challenges in their lives, this can cause a degree of pressure on the individual. It is acknowledged that too much pressure can be harmful and destructive to health and if excessive or long term, this can lead to stress. It is recognised that while stress can result from a build-up of excessive pressures in the workplace, it can equally result from non-work related pressures or life events that transfer the symptoms to the workplace.

3. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote mental health and wellbeing for all staff
- Promote an open and supportive culture where mental health issues can be raised and dealt with effectively
- Communicate and promote the council's commitment to identifying and tackling organisational issues that negatively affect mental health
- Ensure suitable and sufficient risk assessments are conducted to prevent, identify and control sources of work related stress and ensure that the outcomes of risk assessments are reported and acted upon
- Provide employees experiencing mental health problems with access to professional assistance and support
- Reduce barriers to employment for people with a history of mental health.

This policy applies to all employees of Clackmannanshire Council.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Managers
Managers play a key role in creating a mentally healthy workplace and in this regard are responsible for:

- Ensuring as far as is reasonably practicable, that the work environment is safe and that measures are taken to reduce the risk of mental ill health as a result of work related factors;
- Providing supportive leadership and creating an open and supportive environment that encourages employees to discuss issues related to mental ill health;
- Maintaining effective and consistent communication with team members;
- Reviewing management information, being alert to indicators of stress within the team and undertaking risk assessment as appropriate;
- Ensuring that all new employees receive appropriate induction and training and thereafter identifying and meeting the learning needs of all employees through the use of the PDR process and one-to-one meetings;
- Ensuring that all employees are aware of the council's support mechanisms including confidential counselling, occupational health and procedures for dealing with bullying & harassment at work;
- Liaising with Human Resources to maximise support for employees who have mental health problems;
- Supporting employees who become sick as a result of mental ill health in accordance with the council's Maximising Attendance Policy;
- Monitor and report on levels of sickness absence which relate to mental health problems including stress-related illness (in conjunction with the occupational health service and human resources).

4.2 Employees
All employees are obliged to take account of their own health and safety in the workplace along with that of others and in this regard are responsible for:

- Being alert to symptoms of stress in themselves and others;
- Supporting any colleague experiencing poor mental health by encouraging them to speak to their line manager;
- Notifying their line manager as early as possible when they have recognised the symptoms of stress in themselves and discussing how this can be managed at work;
- Seeking appropriate support at the earliest opportunity from their GP or other appropriate agencies if they have health problems;
- Recognising the importance of achieving a work-life balance;
- Effectively managing their workload in conjunction with their line manager to ensure that the demands placed upon them are appropriate and achievable;
- Cooperate with managers to assess levels of stress and engage with measures to support mental ill-health issues.

4.3 Human Resources
Human Resources will

- provide advice and support to employees and managers in relation to this policy.
- Help signpost appropriate support for employees who are experiencing mental ill-health.

4.4 Health & Safety Team

The Health & Safety Team will:

- Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to promote mental wellbeing and report this to the Executive Health & Safety Committee and Tripartite as required.

4.5 Occupational Health

Occupational Health team provide advice to employees and managers to help employees remain at work if possible. They will:

- Provide specialist advice on mental wellbeing.
- Support individuals who have been off sick with mental health and stress problems, and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Refer individuals to workplace counsellors or specialist agencies as required.

4.6 Safety Representatives

Safety representatives can support employees in identifying the causes of stress and meeting with management to raise and address issues which may be causing them stress. They will:

- promote mental wellbeing across the Council.
- encourage employees who approach them to seek appropriate support.

5. Measures for Managing Mental Ill-Health

5.1 Identifying the Causes and Symptoms of Stress

A strong moral and business case exists for addressing the causes of stress in the workplace and the council places emphasis on preventing stress wherever possible. In order to do so, managers and employees alike need to be equipped to identify possible sources and triggers of stress in the workplace.

While the council cannot prevent or control the causes of stress out with the workplace, early identification of the symptoms of stress will allow employees to be supported in the workplace and assisted to manage the circumstances which are causing them stress.

Each team must have a stress risk assessment which identifies the likely sources of stress and measures to control these. These should be reviewed on a regular basis in line with the Risk Assessment policy. The Health & Safety Team can provide support in identifying causes of stress within a team.

Managers are encouraged to have open discussions with employees at an early stage if signs of mental ill-health are noticed. Where issues of mental ill-health are identified, the line manager should liaise with the HR Business Partner to ensure that appropriate support is offered.

5.2 Stress Management Standards

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified six key areas (or risk factors) which may lead to work related stress.

These are:

- the demands of the job;
- employee's control over their work;
- the support an employee receives from managers and colleagues;
- relationships at work;
- role in the organisation;
- change and how it's managed.

Key to managing these risks are ensuring supportive leadership and effective and consistent communication along with appropriate risk assessment. The Council will strive to provide these.

Managers should promote an open and supportive environment which encourages employees to discuss issues. They should ensure that their management style reflects the behaviours outlined in the Council's Competency Framework and Dignity at Work Procedure.

Managers should be particularly aware of the impact that organisational change may have on employees and should ensure that appropriate communication and support is provided, particularly where it is known that an employee may already be vulnerable to stressful reactions.

All employees have a responsibility to treat other employees with dignity and respect.

5.3 Support for Mental Ill-Health

Employees who are experiencing symptoms of mental ill-health are encouraged to advise their manager at the earliest opportunity in order that the most appropriate means of help can be identified and offered.

In some cases the employee's concerns will be alleviated by reviewing the balance of their workload commitments and any other non-work commitments to determine whether they are taking on more than they can realistically cope with. A temporary adjustment to workload priorities and/or some support in self -regulating their work such as the use of time management techniques may be sufficient to assist the employee manage and control their stress levels.

The Stress Risk Assessment process may be helpful to identify more significant issues. The documents for this are issued by the line manager and analysed by the Health and Safety Team. The manager is then responsible for discussing the report and implementing any measures to help control or prevent the stress being exacerbated.

If an employee is not comfortable approaching their manager or having done so feels that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, they should seek advice from Human Resources. Additionally the employee may wish to seek advice from a Trade Union representative, and if appropriate, seek a medical view from their GP. The Council also has a number of employees who have undertaken the Mental Health First Aid training. They can be contacted through the HR Business Partners or the Health & Safety Team.

The council offers free access to an employee assistance programme which can provide support for work and non-work related issues.   This includes:

- Structured Counselling – available via telephone, face to face or online depending on the issues requiring support
- Trauma and Critical Incident Support
- Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy.
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.

Stress Control classes are also held within the Council and the local community.

5.4 Council Policy on Maximising Attendance

Where an employee is advised by their GP to take some time off as a result of a mental health condition, the relevant provisions of the council's Maximising Attendance Policy will apply in conjunction with this policy. In these circumstances, managers should adopt a proactive but sensitive approach so that the employee does not feel isolated or guilty. In this regard the manager should establish with the employee whether regular contact would be helpful and how this should be arranged during the period of absence.

Care should be taken to ensure that any return to work is planned and the employee supported to prevent further absence. Occupational Health advice can be invaluable in achieving this.

5.5 Promotion of a 'Mentally Healthy Workplace'

The council is committed to providing a workplace which promotes the mental wellbeing of all employees. To help achieve this the Council provides training to managers and employees such as the NHS 'Mentally Healthy Workplace' and 'Mental Health First Aid' courses. A number of e-learning courses are also available to all employees.

The Council also runs regular campaigns to encourage awareness of mental health issues.

6. Monitoring and Review

This document is subject to monitoring by management and Trade Unions on an ongoing basis. Revisions and updates will be implemented by the Council following consultation with recognised Trade Unions.