

Happy, Healthy, Here

The Council's Happy Healthy Here at work policy has been developed to promote and encourage physical and mental health and wellbeing at work so that you are happy, healthy and here.

The Council recognises that its employees are its most valuable and important asset and it is committed to providing the support and assistance necessary to enable everyone to undertake their job in an environment that is as healthy and stress free as possible.

Wellbeing is an important factor in job satisfaction and is considered a management issue. This policy is designed to create an organisational culture where negative wellbeing issues are identified, minimised and managed before they affect the wellbeing of staff. We have a clear aim to promote the positive aspects and ideas associated physical and mental health and wellbeing at work.

Experience demonstrates that organisations which adopt a positive approach to improving health and wellbeing across the organisation, may achieve substantially reduced costs associated with:

- Absenteeism
- Staff turnover
- Risk management
- Increased staff morale, job enrichment, quality of life
- Continuous improvement of achievement
- Improved productivity and overall organisational performance

East Devon District Council recognises that mental health is as important as physical health and is recognised as a 'Mindful Employer' which is an external endorsement of our commitment to promoting good mental health.

What is the Council's policy?

It is the policy of the Council to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing through its management policies, support services, information, networks and health promotions. The Council will promote good practice in both physical and mental health and wellbeing activities.

The Council will ensure the provision of training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices appropriate to this policy.

The Council will consult with trade union representatives, health and safety representatives and other stakeholders on all proposed action relating to physical and mental health and wellbeing and in particular the prevention of workplace stress.

As part of this commitment and in relation to mental health, we will:

- ensure stress risk assessments specifically to address work-related and/or personal stress
- promote a culture of open communication, so that employees feel confident that any concerns they raise about work practices or the working environment will be addressed
- determine if stress in the workplace is a problem, by actively seeking employees' views where appropriate
- take account of stress and mental wellbeing when planning and allocating workloads, and reallocate work where necessary
- monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that colleagues are not overworking
- monitoring holidays to ensure that colleagues are using their annual leave entitlement
- facilitate requests for flexible working using our WorkSmart principles
- review factors that might indicate stress in the workplace, such as high rates of absenteeism or staff turnover, arguments or decreased performance levels
- use mediation to ensure that working relationships can be improved where necessary
- communicate this policy and grievance and disciplinary policies regularly
- take steps to eliminate, control or reduce work-related stress
- ensure that arrangements are in place for colleagues to report work-related stress or poor mental health to their line managers and that line managers are appropriately trained to identify the symptoms of work-related stress or poor mental health
- encourage employees to inform their line manager of any stress-related or mental health issues or problems

Understanding stress and mental health

Stress is the adverse reaction individuals have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. People feel stress when they cannot cope with pressures and other issues. For example, employees can get stressed if they feel they don't have the skills or time to meet tight deadlines. Stress is not in of itself an illness, but if sustained over a period of time, it can lead to mental and sometimes physical illness.

Mental health is a term used to describe our state of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing; it affects how we think, feel and act and how we cope with the normal pressures of everyday life. Positive mental health is rarely an absolute state. Factors both in and out of work affect the mental health of employees and move them up or down a spectrum that ranges from good to poor. For example, an employee may generally have positive mental health, but a relationship break-up may trigger a period of depression moving them into poor mental health.

There is an important distinction between working under pressure and experiencing stress. Certain levels of pressure are acceptable and normal in every job role. They can improve performance, enable people to achieve their full potential and provide a sense of achievement and job satisfaction. However, when pressure becomes excessive, it produces stress and poor mental health and they can additionally compound normal workplace pressures.

The Council recognises that people react to similar situations in different ways and that what triggers stress and poor mental health in one person may not affect another.

Supporting mental wellbeing and addressing stress

The Council is committed to providing a system to support good mental health for everyone and to help minimise and alleviate stress and poor mental health in the workplace. It is the Council's intention to deal constructively and sympathetically with stress and poor mental health. Stress or poor mental health will not be treated as a sign of weakness.

If you feel that your work performance or your mental health is suffering because of excessive pressure or stress-related matters, whether those matters are occurring outside the workplace or within the work environment, you should first raise this with your line manager or with your Human Resources Business Partner.

Your line manager or HR Business Partner will arrange a meeting with you to discuss what steps can be taken to address the matter or to assist you to deal with it. This may include reviewing your current job role, responsibilities, workload and working hours, reviewing your working environment and or referring the matter to Occupational Health.

Alternatively, if you feel your stress in in your view entirely work-related you may if you prefer, invoke the Council's grievance procedure.

Please note that if you do not tell the Council that you are suffering from stress or poor mental health and are unable to cope, or if the Council is unaware that you have a particular problem, condition or vulnerability, we will not be in a position to help you.

Confidentiality

Information about stress and mental health is highly sensitive. Every member of staff is responsible for observing the high levels of confidentiality that is required when dealing with information about stress or mental health, whether they are supporting a work colleague or because they are otherwise involved in the operation of a workplace policy or procedure. Breach of confidentiality is likely to result in disciplinary action being taken under the Council's disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches of confidentiality will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal.

However there may be occasions where information about stress or mental health needs to be shared with third parties. For example where steps need to be taken to address work-related stress such as reallocating work within a team or department, where allegations of bullying, harassment, victimisation or other misconduct require a disciplinary investigation or proceedings to take place, or where medical advice is required on how to support an employee and address issues raised by work-related stress or poor mental health. In these circumstances, wherever possible, the matter will be discussed with the employee concerned before any action is taken.

Key initiatives, activities, policies and processes which positively impact employee wellbeing

The following initiatives and activities support the Council's commitment to the physical and mental health and wellbeing of its workforce to ensure that people are happy, healthy and here.

Staff Engagement Surveys

The Council undertakes annual Staff Engagement surveys annually and Investor in People surveys from time to time. These ask staff to comment on all aspects of working for East Devon District Council. Action plans are drawn up to ensure that issues are addressed.

Stress Audits and Focus Groups

Stress audits and focus groups are run where issues arise. These are used as a tool to address issues as they arise within service areas by gaining feedback directly from staff and developing appropriate action plans.

Stress audits provide a framework for East Devon District Council to use when assessing the risk of stress in our workplace and when working together to tackle issues effectively.

Stress audits involve an anonymous questionnaire to employees regarding the following areas:

- Demands – coping with demands of the job
- Control – what say you have over the way work is done
- Support – support from colleagues and superiors
- Relationships – any unacceptable behaviour (bullying)
- Role – clarity over role and responsibilities
- Change – how the organisation handles changes.

The questionnaires are designed by the Health and Safety Executive and are often supported with focus groups to help provide more detail about issues and causes and to discuss possible solutions.

The relevant Strategic Lead are presented with summary reports regarding any issues in their areas which require action. There will be communication to employees to ensure that feedback is given regarding points raised through the questionnaires and focus groups.

Team Building

In some cases, team building days can be used to address issues raised in stress audits and focus groups or to deal with conflict/issues arising in a team.

Individual and Team Mediation

Mediation is used to deal with workplace conflict before it escalates and to help avoid the need to resort to formal grievance procedures. The focus for mediation is on improving working relationships.

Training

EDDC offers a full suite of people management and leadership training. Managing change will become a mandatory course for all managers from 2020. This was mandatory in 2018 to coincide with relocation.

All employees are required to complete Handling Workplace Stress learning module.

Employee Assistance Programme (including counselling services)

The employee assistance programme is available to all employees on a confidential basis.

In addition to self-help provisions on the HealthAssured.co.uk website there is also a helpline/on-line chat covering relationships, addiction, money and caring responsibility worries.

Counselling (telephone and face to face) can also be accessed through this service, providing employees with the opportunity to work with a trained Counsellor to explore coping with difficult issues or situations that arise in either work or home life. This service is communicated via notice boards and the intranet.

In addition, help can be obtained from Mind, the mental health charity at <https://www.mind.org.uk> or the Samaritans at <https://www.samaritans.org>.

Mindful Employer

Positive about mental health EDDC is a Mindful Employer. Managers and staff are provided with Mindful Employer materials which provide helpful information relating to mental health and mental health wellbeing.

Annual Performance Excellence Reviews

Annual Performance Excellence Review meetings supported by regular 121s provide opportunities for employees and managers to have discussions on an individual basis regarding performance, priorities and workplace issues.

Happy Healthy Here initiatives

Studies have shown that regular, light daily or moderate exercise is beneficial for the prevention of heart disease and other life threatening diseases. The provision of opportunities for physical activity is one way that workplaces can contribute to promoting health and preventing illness.

At EDDC, these initiatives include nutritional advice and guidance; support for giving up smoking; health checks and the promotion of alternative therapies.

We also allow all employees 30 minutes twice per week for Happy, Healthy and Here activities and exercise. So if you take time to exercise during your working week, you can amend your flexi record manually to reflect the 30 minutes the Council is providing. Prior to taking this time you should ensure you have obtained the agreement of your line manager.

Activities which qualify for a 30 minute paid break up to twice a week include:

- Council initiatives such as organised walks, core exercise classes, smoking cessation or nutrition talks
- Group organised jogging
- Going to the gym, swimming or any other kind of exercise class (evidence may be required by your line manager)

There are showers and changing facilities at Blackdown House and Exmouth Town Hall and LED offer Council employees discounts on membership of 20%.