



# Stress Policy

Reviewed	Date of Next Review	Responsibility
July 2025	July 2027	Head of HR

## Our Mission:

**'To enable young people to live and work without barriers'**

## Our Values:

- **Teamwork** – we hold ourselves and each other to account and are better when we work together
- **Compassion** – we act with trust, honesty and kindness in everything we do
- **Inclusion** – we treat each other fairly and with respect
- **Innovation** – we encourage thoughtful, creative and aspirational ideas
- **Pride** – we encourage each other to be proud of who we are and what we do

## Introduction

- 1.1. Fairfield Trust (FT) recognises that stress at work can be harmful and may have a detrimental effect upon both employees and the business as a whole. As an employer, the Trust has a responsibility to ensure that work demands match employees' skills, capabilities and knowledge. At organisational level, stress can result in deterioration of morale, performance and increase staff turnover and sickness absence levels. This policy sets out the Trust's approach to mitigating the risk of placing staff under unacceptable levels of stress and our approach to managing instances of work-related stress.

## 2. Definition of stress

- 2.1. The Health & Safety Executive defines stress as *"the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them."* This makes an important distinction between pressure and stress. Pressure can be motivating and may improve performance and provide job satisfaction. Stress is a negative reaction that people have to excessive pressures which may make them feel unable to cope. Stress is a state and If excessive pressure (stress) continues for prolonged periods of time, it can have adverse effects on an individual's physical and mental health as well as performance at work.
- 2.2. Stress affects people differently – what stresses one person may not necessarily stress another. There are six main areas of work design that can affect levels of stress. These are:
  - Demands
  - Control
  - Support
  - Relationships
  - Role
  - Change

Recognising signs of stress will help the Trust to take steps to stop, lower and manage stress in the workplace.

## 3. Symptoms and causes of stress

- 3.1. Stress is not an illness, but it can make people unwell. It can cause symptoms that affect how people feel both physically and mentally. Any tasks, responsibilities and day-to-day problems may result in pressures and demands being placed upon an employee. Individuals usually respond well to reasonable pressures which may be considered positive and motivational. These pressures can provide the key to a sense of achievement and job satisfaction.
- 3.2. When there is excessive and unreasonable workplace pressure, it might become harmful. This can then damage performance and can be detrimental to the health of the workforce as described below:
  - Harmful stress levels differ for individuals, based on personality, experience, motivation and the support received from management, colleagues, family and friends. Where pressures build and continue, the negative effects of stress can become sustained and far more damaging, leading to longer-term psychological problems and physical ill health.

- Workers who are experiencing excessive levels of stress may state that they are unable to cope with the demands of the job, that they do not understand their role and responsibilities or that they do not receive enough information or support.
- Long-term stress has been associated with conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, anxiety, depression and thyroid disorders, this may lead to increased levels of long term staff sickness absence.
- There can also be associated behavioral effects, such as increased anxiety, poor mental health, irritability, difficulty sleeping, poor concentration and an inability to deal calmly with everyday tasks and situations. This can have a negative impact on colleagues and the wider team.
- The ability to cope with elevated levels of stress can also be affected by events outside of work. Situations such as bereavement, family sickness, marital or other inter-personal problems may also cause stress.

### 3.3. Causes of potentially harmful stress levels may be:

- Pressures which are cumulative and/or prolonged.
- Lack of training/support to successfully fulfill the role.
- Demands that do not align with the person's skills and knowledge and results in the individual feeling out of control.
- Demands which are conflicting, unclear instructions, unrealistic deadlines or excessive workload.
- Elevated levels of uncertainty or inappropriate utilisation of skills.
- Inflexible and/or over-demanding work, beyond that of the job description, and/or travel schedules.
- Prolonged interpersonal conflicts or breakdown of relationships.
- Absence of supportive leadership and/or lack of understanding from managers.

### 3.4. Physical conditions such as noise, light, heat, humidity or vibration may also increase stress levels for the employees working within that environment.

## **4. FT approach to managing stress**

- 4.1. FT takes the health and wellbeing of the workforce very seriously, this includes supporting employees with both their physical and mental health, involving medical professionals where appropriate to do so and always in discussion/agreement with the employee.
- 4.2. Managers carry out routine 'wellbeing check ins' with their teams to ensure that staff can talk openly about their mental health and to raise any issues or concerns. Managers also hold 1:1s with their teams at least termly.
- 4.3. If staff are feeling the effects of stress, or suspect a colleague is stressed, they should inform their manager. Managers will examine the causes of stress involved and together with the Head of HR, will explore ways in which stress can be eliminated or reduced. This will be done in full consultation with the affected employee. The employee may also be asked to undertake a confidential consultation with Occupational Health.
- 4.4. The necessary adjustments will be made in accordance with the cause of stress, the nature of work and the resources available. Such measures may include:

- Ensuring that employees' skills, abilities and personalities match the demands of the job, which may mean varying the type of work or work location.
- Improving training.
- Improving career structures.
- Improving lines of communication.
- Reviewing the Job Description/working hours.
- In some instances, it may be effective to implement long term change aimed at improving the quality of working life. These measures may include:
  - Meeting on a regular basis to identify, investigate and attempt to solve work-related problems.
  - Taking a critical look at the organisation of tasks, in consultation with the employee.
  - Reviewing responsibilities for a defined area of work and making changes where possible.
  - Consider delegating work throughout the team. This gives a group of people greater responsibility for effective performance whilst also setting specific goals for the team.

4.4. It is sometimes necessary for managers to invoke disciplinary procedures to address poor performance or conduct, where appropriate to do so. It is recognised that the prospect of disciplinary proceedings or the proceedings themselves may be stressful for the staff involved. This should not in itself prevent managers from pursuing legitimate management action: indeed, lengthy delays in the disciplinary process may aggravate stress. Line managers should, however, seek advice from the Head of HR, as to how to support the member of staff concerned while the disciplinary process is in progress to mitigate the effects of stress. Similar advice may be necessary in the context of the Grievance procedure.

## **5 Ill health**

- 5.1. Where an employee suffers from ill health and is absent from work due to work related stress, FT will not place him/her back into their previous job role without first effecting change where necessary and in full discussion with the employee. The employee will be invited to a welfare meeting where the following may be considered:
- An introduction of a safe system of work.
  - Review of the job role and responsibilities, where practicable. A change in working hours or location may be considered as part of this.
  - Redeployment into a less stressful role.
  - Any other measures that FT can take within its control to alleviate the stress and enable a return to work for the employee.
- 5.2. It may not be possible to eliminate all pressures that are believed to be causing stress at work however, FT aims to make all employees aware of such factors and manage any such issues as effectively as possible.
- 5.3. In the event of the Capability Processes being implemented, FT will follow a fair process as set out in the Employee Handbook.

## **6. Employee Responsibilities**

6.1 To minimise the risk of work-related stress, staff should:

- Ensure good communication with colleagues and their line manager. This includes talking to their manager if they are unclear about roles or responsibilities or in the event of feeling the negative effects of stress.
- Teamwork - Support colleagues by sharing knowledge and resources wherever possible. Staff should alert their line manager if they believe that a colleague (or themselves) appear to be struggling or suffering from stress in the workplace.
- Engage in the Trust's Yearly Review process and regular discussions with their line manager about performance, acting on feedback.
- Raise issues of concern or any difficulties at an early stage and work in collaboration with line managers to find solutions and positive ways of working.
- Make use of the support and training resources available, such as Occupational Health, always in discussion with HR.
- Ensure that harassment and bullying are not tolerated and report any instances via the correct channels immediately.

## **7. Long-term strategy**

7.1. To ensure that instances of stress are minimised, FT will ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable, jobs will be designed in such a manner that:

- The responsibility and tasks can be effectively communicated to each post holder.
- The job is achievable by the post holder who can receive credit for its accomplishment.
- Employees are not given a role for which they do not have the ability, skills or knowledge.
- Timely training, responsibilities, instructions about the job, the working environment shall be prioritised at the point of induction or in the event of the substantive job role changing.

7.2. Where appropriate, as part of the Trust's risk assessment process, jobs will be assessed to identify tasks and responsibilities that may place prolonged and harmful levels of stress upon the post holders. Where necessary, and in consultation with the post holders, job design may be altered to reduce the risk.

7.3. It is each employee's responsibility to become familiar with this policy and adhere to its terms.

## **8. Review of policy**

8.1. The SLT (Senior Leadership Team) and Trustees will perform a key role in ensuring this policy is implemented.

8.2. The SLT and the Trustees will oversee monitoring the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

8.3. This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Tamasin Jones**

Head of HR

July 2025