

Stress Management POLICY & PROCEDURE

OFFICIAL

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Policy

Statement

Merseyside Police recognises that policing is a demanding occupation, and that officers and staff may experience things that are inherently stressful. We are committed to improving the wellbeing of our workforce and creating an environment that cares for its people.

We recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue, and we acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stress.

We are committed to putting measures in place to proactively prevent and manage stress. We promote a healthy working environment which removes the stigma surrounding stress, thereby empowering individuals to raise the issue of stress and access the necessary support services available.

This policy complies with the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and other associated legislation.

Aims

The policy aims to outline the forces commitment to creating a healthy environment with healthy people. The policy also aims to ensure that we are compliant with Health and Safety legislation and fulfil our duty of care towards our workforce.

Objectives

The main objectives of this policy are to:

- raise awareness of stress and how it can affect individuals
- outline support available to individuals to help reduce or cope with stress
- outline line managers responsibilities and how to manage stress in accordance with HSE management standards
- reduce and minimise the detrimental impact stress can have on the workforce.

Application and Scope

All police officers and police staff, including the extended police family and those working voluntarily or under contract to Merseyside Police must be aware of, and are required to comply with, all relevant policy and associated procedures.

Outcome Evaluation

Strategic oversight of the health and safety of the workforce including stress management is covered in appropriate corporate boards.

Procedure

Version History

Version Number	Date	Detailed rational behind amending/updating policy or procedure.	Policy Owner Details	Policy Author Details
3.0	31/01/14	Revised to reflect the removal of the Police Authority and major changes to the HR structure and roles.	People Services	People Services
4.0	06/01/26	Full review and re-write - inclusion of wellbeing support to proactively manage stress in the workplace, additional guidance about signs of stress and links updated to HSE management standard. Update formatting to current Force standard template	Head of People Services and Operational Delivery	HR Manager: Policy and Procedure
4.1	05/06/26	Revised terms and naming conventions following implementation of Force Operational Review and 2025 Force Strategy	Head of People Services and Operational Delivery	

1. Stress

- 1.1. Stress can affect anyone at any time. This procedure outlines measures implemented by the force to control, minimise and proactively prevent the detrimental impact stress can have on individual members of the workforce.
- 1.2. We recognise stress as a health and safety issue and the force has a legal obligation and duty of care to take reasonable and preventative steps.
- 1.3. All staff have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of themselves and other members of staff. Managers are responsible for the implementation of this policy and the force is responsible for providing the necessary resources.
- 1.4. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work related stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work”.

- 1.5. According to the HSE, stress is not an illness, but it can make individuals ill. Stress may become an illness if it is excessive and prolonged, and a mental and/or physical illness develops as a result.
- 1.6. A certain amount of pressure is a normal part of most jobs, and it can be beneficial in helping to keep an individual motivated. However, there is a point at which too much pressure can have a detrimental effect on the individual and result in them experiencing stress. The tipping point will differ from person to person.
- 1.7. We are committed to promoting a supportive healthy environment with a culture which enables individuals to talk through their concerns. And where individuals who are feeling the effects of stress and any subsequent psychological ill health can access appropriate support, and the force will ensure appropriate mitigations are in place for workplace stressors.

2. Wellbeing support

- 2.1. We offer a range of wellbeing support which can be accessed on the Health and Wellbeing pages on iforce.
- 2.2. Our **psychological** support provisions for officers and staff includes a range of self-referral provisions in which support can be accessed in a timely and appropriate way. This helps to empower individuals to access the support they need, as there is a range of different initiatives from peer support to in-house psychological therapy services.
- 2.3. Some aspects of policing duties are inherently stressful, which may cause a cumulative or traumatic adverse reaction due to the pressure or demands caused by these duties. As a force we take all reasonable steps to manage these situations, including critical incident psychological debriefs.
- 2.4. Occupational Health will arrange regular support sessions for officers and staff in specialist (High Risk) roles. These roles have been identified in consultation with Trade Unions and Staff Associations and are subject to regular review. Line managers should also refer to the guidance for supporting staff/officers in high stress roles, available on iForce.
- 2.5. Further information about our wellbeing offer and initiatives can be found on the [Health and Wellbeing](#) pages on iforce; including advice on “looking after your wellbeing” and links to external support.

3. Signs and symptoms of stress

- 3.1. Line managers should be alert to the risk of workplace stress. The nature of certain roles may mean that individuals are in high-pressured environments, dealing with fluctuations in demand and varying workloads. Some individuals may be more prone to stress, become more

vulnerable to stress due to external factors, and/or the individual's resilience to stress may change over time.

- 3.2. It is not a requirement to eliminate all pressure in the workplace but once there is an indication that an individual is experiencing stress, there is a legal and common law duty to minimise the risk as far as reasonably practical.
- 3.3. It is expected that individuals may feel under pressure from time to time in the course of their duties, or due to external personal pressures and it may be difficult to identify when the pressure becomes stress.
- 3.4. Behaviours which may indicate that an individual is experiencing stress could include:
 - displaying negative or depressive emotions
 - increased emotional reactions, for example being tearful, sensitive or aggressive
 - loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
 - mood swings
 - lack of concentration
 - indecision
 - poor memory
 - changes in eating or sleeping habits
 - increased smoking, alcohol consumption or drug use
 - nervous or "twitchy" behaviour
 - changes in attendance, for example arriving late for work or taking an unusual amount of sickness absence
 - working long hours and/or not taking breaks and
 - poor performance.
- 3.5. Line managers should be aware of changes to individuals' behaviour that are more than a "one-off". Line managers should take prompt action to sensitively and confidentially speak to their team member and sign post them to appropriate services, e.g. internal Health and Wellbeing support or to their own GP.
- 3.6. If an individual has a stress related absence, line managers should follow the HSE Management Standards below and also refer to the Attendance Management Policy and Procedure to ensure effective steps are taken to manage both the absence and to mitigate and reduce stress.

4. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards

- 4.1. Where an individual has reported work-related stress, this must be dealt with to ensure all reasonable actions have been taken to remove or minimise the impact of the stressor.
- 4.2. The HSE has published a set of [Management Standards](#) for stress covering six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work.

These are:

- a) **Demands** – this includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
 - b) **Control** – how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
 - c) **Support** – this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
 - d) **Relationships** – this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
 - e) **Role** – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
 - f) **Change** – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.
- 4.3. The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that, if present, reflect a high level of health, wellbeing and organisational performance.
- 4.4. These standards should be taken into account when addressing individual or stress hot spot cases and when completing a Stress Management and Stress Questionnaire and Risk assessment, which is available on iforce.

5. Responsibilities

5.1. Individual responsibilities:

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of stress, take care of themselves and take action to seek support if experiencing stress.
- Individuals are encouraged to inform their line manager if there are any issues that are impacting on their wellbeing at work.
- Co-operate and engage with line managers, OHU and/or Health and Safety teams to explore ways in which stress can be managed and minimised, where possible.

5.2. Line Manager responsibilities:

- Be aware of their health and safety responsibilities, including the management of stress.
- Encourage a supportive work environment which enables and encourages their team members to prioritise their health and wellbeing and make effective use of the wellbeing offer from OHU.
- Must carry out effective stress risk assessments when an individual has reported work-related stress ; risk assessments must be monitored and reviewed.
- Seek advice and alert their command team if they identify trends or concerns in relation to stress incidents
- Liaise with the Health and Safety team for advice and support where necessary.
- Effectively manage any stress related sickness absence in accordance with the Attendance Management policy and procedure.

5.3. BCU/Command Teams responsibilities:

- Provide leadership which creates an environment which supports healthy environments and healthy people.
- Ensure that work activities have been suitably and sufficiently assessed, and appropriate control measures implemented to reduce any risks to the lowest level reasonably practical.
- Ensure sufficient oversight is in place to identify and manage workplace hotspots.
- Engage with relevant teams; including health and safety, People Services (People Partner), OHU and Staff Associations and Trade Unions to ensure appropriate actions are taken to support the health and safety of officers and staff.

5.4. People Services responsibilities:

People Services provide a number of support functions in relation to stress management:

- **Health and Safety Team:**
 - Provide advice and guidance to officers and staff at all levels in respect of health and safety
 - Undertake audits and inspections to ensure health and safety is being managed effectively
 - Can provide training to managers on risk assessments and stress awareness
 - Liaise with OHU in relation to stress and ill health
 - Manage and monitor force accidents and near misses
 - Attend local health and safety committees; and offer stress focus groups to inform Senior Leaders of common stressors /themes.

- **Occupational Health Unit (OHU)**

- Provide a comprehensive wellbeing offer to support the wellbeing of staff and officers.
- Provide psychological services, including self-referrals, wellbeing workshops and critical incident de-briefs.
- Arrange support for staff and officers in high-risk roles
- Provide advice and guidance to managers on individual cases involving work-related stress (through case management process).

- **People Policy Advisors**

- Provide HR advice and guidance to line managers on the application of this policy
- Provide advice and guidance in relation to the stress-related absences

5.5. **Staff Associations and Trade Unions**

- Offer support to members and signpost their members to services for managing stress and wellbeing.
- Participate as members at corporate meetings/boards to provide feedback to management on stress and wellbeing and advocate for their members.