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Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Document Control Sheet

Document title	Managing Work Related Stress
Summary of purpose	The purpose of this policy and procedure is to provide information and guidance on managing work related stress in employees at Maldon District Council. It is recognised that the Council has a duty of care towards its employees which extends to mental health as well as physical health and the Council seeks to identify any sources of stress in the workplace and take action to reduce harmful stress.
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Validity Statement

This document is due for review as appropriate or as required by legislative changes. Users of the policy should ensure that they are consulting the currently valid version of the document.

If you would like this information in large print, Braille or another language, please contact HR.

MALDON DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

CONTENTS

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Stress	The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or types of demand placed on them. There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor, and stress. Stress is a natural reaction to demand or pressure and people are adapted to be able to cope with short term stress, but if pressure is prolonged, too frequent, or out of control, stress reactions can become chronic and lead to ill health.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

SECTION A – POLICY

1. Policy Statement, Aims and Objectives

1.1.   Maldon District Council ('the Council') is committed to supporting and protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees. It is recognised that this duty of care extends mental health as well as physical health and the Council seeks to identify any sources of stress in the workplace and take action to reduce harmful stress.

1.2.   This policy places emphasis on maintaining positive mental health and in particular recognises how, unless proper arrangements are in place, stress in the workplace can impact adversely on an individual's performance and ultimately the delivery of the Council's organisational objectives.

1.3.   This policy outlines the legislation relating to stress at work and the possible causes and symptoms of stress.

1.4.   The development of this policy will:

- Ensure that legal requirements are complied with as far as it is reasonably practicable, promote best practice, and improve knowledge and skills in stress management.
- Identify as far as it reasonable practicable, workplace stressors, and conduct risk assessments to eliminate or reduce stress, or control the risks from stress. Risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Provide support and advice for effective stress management.
- Ensure the access to free and confidential counselling for employees affected by stress either caused by work or external factors is available, via the Council's Employee Assistance Programme provider.
- Ensure a risk management process is in place to report principal risks to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).

2.   Legislation and Guidance

2.1.   Whilst there is no specific legislation on controlling stress at work the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have issued standards that can be used to assist in assessing risk and the management of work related stress issues. In addition:

- Employers have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonable practicable, that their workplaces are safe and healthy.

- Under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 employers are obliged to assess the nature and scale of risks to health in their workplace a n d base their control measures on it.

- Advice from the HSE states that 'Ill health from workplace stress must be

treated in the same way as ill health from other physical hazards. Employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure employee's health is not placed at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, the way people deal with each other at work or from the day to day demands of work'.

- Working Time Regulations 1998 limit the working week to an average of 48 hours. However, a member of staff may under certain circumstances opt out of these arrangements but they must agree in writing to work more than the 4 8 hours. Employees are not encouraged to work beyond 48 hours in order to maintain an effective work life balance.

- Illnesses such as depression or mental ill health will in certain circumstances secure protection under the Equality Act 2010 and as such reasonable adjustments to employment should be made to enable the employee to return to work. Further advice in contained in the Managing Attendance Policy and Procedure.

- The Council may be subject to legal proceedings should an employee suffer any detriment to their health due to work related stress and therefore is required to take a proactive approach to reduce the risk of work related stress.

3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to those members of staff who are directly employed by the Council and for whom the Council has legal responsibility.

As part of good employment practice, agency workers are also required to abide by the Council's policies and procedures, as appropriate, to ensure their health, safety and welfare whilst undertaking work for the Council.

4. Accountabilities and Responsibilities

4.1 Overall accountability for the health, safety and welfare of the workforce lies with the Chief Executive. Responsibility is delegated to the following:

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Corporate Leadership Team and all line managers	Have delegated responsibility for: • Ensuring good communication between management and employees. • Ensuring employees are provided with meaningful development opportunities. • Ensuring workloads are monitored to ensure manageable workloads. • Ensuring deadlines are realistic.
All line managers	Have delegated responsibility for: • Ensuring the policy is communicated to employees and to endeavour to preserve and promote positive mental health and reduce negative stress. • Encouraging employees to discuss any problems and avail themselves of support available. • Ensuring regular Performance Conversations (one to ones) with individual employees include a discussion on wellbeing. • Consideration of the impact on wellbeing of any decisions taken and where appropriate ensuring risk assessments are undertaken. Potential stressors may include changes in the physical environment, deployment of the workforce and the impact of new technology. • Identifying and responding effectively to employees with problems and recognising work situations that may lead to excessive stress levels. • Taking all reasonable steps to alleviate excessive stress. • Seeking advice from Human Resources as soon as possible when a cause for concern is raised or identified. • Referral of employees to Occupational Health/Staff counselling where appropriate.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

All Staff	Have delegated responsibility for: • Awareness of their own range of feelings and reactions to stressful situations and their personal methods of coping. • Recognising the warning signs of excessive stress being suffered by colleagues. • Expressing their views to colleagues and managers and/or Human Resources regarding potential work related stressors. • Seeking professional advice and support by either management or self-referral to Occupational Health Services and/or Staff Counselling when unable to cope with excessive stress whether generated by work or personal problems that are impacting on work. • Taking all reasonable steps to ensure that they do not cause unnecessary stress to others. • Completing staff surveys.
Human Resources	Have delegated responsibility for: • Providing advice and guidance in relation to this policy. • Offering support and advice to both managers and employees experiencing problems with stress. • Monitoring the reasons for sickness absence. • Ensuring the appropriate provision of training. • Encouraging referral to support services. • Ensuring significant risks highlighted through sickness absence monitoring or risk assessments are anonymised and recorded accordingly.
Occupational Health Services	Have responsibility for: • Advising managers or employees who identify potential problems in their area or in themselves. • Identify the necessary support for employees who are referred by their line manager because of concerns about their well- being.

5. Dissemination, Training and Review

5.1. Dissemination

5.1.1. The effective implementation of this procedural document will support openness and transparency. The Council will:

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

- Ensure all staff and stakeholders have access to a copy of this document via the intranet.
- Communicate to staff any relevant action to be taken via staff meetings/email.

5.2.   Training

5.2.1. All staff will be offered relevant training commensurate with their duties and responsibilities. Staff requiring support should speak to their line manager in the first instance. Support may also be obtained through the HR Department.

5.3.   Review

5.3.1. As part of its development, this policy and its impact on staff, customers and the public has been reviewed in line with the Council's Equality Duties. The purpose of the assessment is to identify and if possible remove any disproportionate adverse impact on employees, customers and the public on the grounds of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

5.3.2. The procedural document will be reviewed as required and in accordance with the following on an as and when required basis:

- Legislatives changes
- Good practice guidelines
- Case Law
- Significant incidents reported
- New vulnerabilities identified
- Changes to organisational infrastructure
- Changes in practice

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

SECTION B – PROCEDURE

1. Causes of Stress and Preventative Measures

1.1.   It is accepted that any job can cause stress and also that stress is not just about overwork as boredom and monotony can also be stressful.

1.2.   The following table details the most common causes of stress and how they could be prevented.

Cause of Stress	Preventative Measure
Dealing with demanding customers or the public	Ensure employees are trained in conflict resolution and that they are fully supported by their line manager through regular Performance Conversation meetings.
Financial cuts, organisational change and lack of job security	Ensure any organisational restructuring is done in partnership with Unison and in consultation with employees. HR will ensure the process followed has the minimum adverse effect on employees.
Poor working conditions	Where poor working conditions are identified the line manager will arrange for a suitable workplace risk assessment to be conducted and advice will be sought on achieving safe working conditions.
Threats of violence, harassment and bullying	Employees should be aware of the Grievance policy, which refers to bully and harassment in the workplace and early intervention and advice should be sought from the employee's line manager or Human Resources.
Lack of childcare or flexibility	Where possible flexible working arrangements should be offered to staff who are struggling to manage child care and work. A scheme is in place which provides financial assistance with childcare.
Lack of control over work	Managers should have regular Performance Conversation meetings with employees and should aim to empower employees to manage their own workload. Where there are elements of work that may be outside of the employee's control the manager should ensure the employee understands the reason for this and understands what is expected of them.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Too demanding a job or too high a workload	If it becomes apparent that the employee is finding the job too demanding the manager should ensure that the employee is clear on what is expected and that they are given the appropriate training and development to undertake their role and have realistic objectives to achieve. From time to time there will be peaks and troughs of work and the employee and the manager should work together to plan the workload. Where the workload is consistently high the manager may be required to assess the staffing levels within the service area.
Monotonous or boring work	Where possible the manager should include some variety of work. Some people enjoy work of a repetitive nature, others do not and the manager and the employee may need to have a discussion about the suitability of the role for the individual concerned. The Performance Review process can be used to encourage and support the employee to develop their skills in order to move to an alternative role.
Lack of Leaning and Development	Managers should ensure that they enable the employee to access the appropriate learning identified as part of the Performance Review process. The individual should take responsibility for sourcing the learning and may seek advice from the Learning & Engagement Officer.
Excessive Hours	Where it is apparent an employee is working excessively the manager should discuss the reasons for this with the individual.
Working in isolation	Managers should ensure that employees working in isolation are familiar with the arrangements for lone working and that they are included in team meetings and have regular Performance Conversations.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Working relationships	Managers should discuss working relationships are part of the Performance Conversation meeting and issues that are raised are dealt with in a constructive and supportive manner.

The above list is not exhaustive.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

1.3.   The HSE guidance identifies six risk factors linked with work related stress:

- **Demands:** issues like workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control:** how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support:** includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships:** includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role:** whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles.
- **Change:** how organisational change is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Further information can be accesses on www.hse.gov.uk/stress

1.4.   For each of the hazards listed above managers should ask what action is already being taken, is it enough and what more could be done. Control measures may include removing the risk altogether, reorganising the workload, considering short or long term flexible working options, providing clear guidelines and instructions to employees and offering support via Occupational Health or the Employee Assistance Programme if appropriate.

2. Symptoms of Stress

2.1.   If an employee is experiencing stress at work they may develop some of the following symptoms:

- Anxiety
- Tension
- Disturbed sleep
- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Weight loss/gain
- Skin rashes
- Muscle fatigue particularly neck and shoulders
- Raised blood pressure/rapid heartbeat
- Increased use of alcohol, smoking or drugs
- Tensions at home

2.2.   These symptoms may manifest themselves at work as:

- Irritability and moodiness
- Fall in performance, inability or reduced ability to cope with normal tasks and situations
- Becoming accident prone

- Forgetfulness
- Poor timekeeping
- Increased sickness absence
- Depression and general negative outlook

2.3.   Without intervention these symptoms can develop into serious long term health conditions. Managers should refer to the Managing Performance Policy for guidance in handling cases of poor performance. Advice should be sought from Human Resources before any action is instigated.

3. Managing Identified Stress

3.1.   Once a cause for concern is identified either by an individual employee or by a manager, the manager should arrange to meet with the individual employee and should seek advice from Human Resources who may provide support at the meeting.

3.2.   The purpose of the meeting will be to establish what the causes of the stress are, what symptoms are being experienced and how to support the individual to manage their symptoms, reduce and/or remove the causal factors where possible, taking into account the preventative measures shown in the table in paragraph 1.2.

3.3.   The next step will be to arrange a stress risk assessment which will be carried out by the manager, supported by Human Resources. Following the assessment a report will be produced which will be used to develop an action plan to address the areas of concern.

3.4.   In some circumstances, where there is a significant impact on the individual, a referral to Occupational Health will be required. Wherever this is the case the stress risk assessment report should be sent to Occupational Health with the referral.

3.5.   Action plans should set out specific and measurable actions and outcomes and should be time limited.

3.6.   Regular review meetings should be held with the individual until the achievement of the action plan. Managers should subsequently ensure as part of routine Performance Conversation meetings that any further problems are identified at the earliest possible opportunity and action is taken to prevent any escalation of symptoms.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Appendix 1

GUIDANCE ON HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICY – FLOWCHART

How might an individual become aware of and recognise stress for themselves?

- Unable to concentrate or remember things
- Losing sleep through worrying
- Feeling anxious, irritable and/or depressed
- Feelings of panic
- More days off sick than usual
- Avoidance of social situations
- A colleague, manager, friend letting you know that you appear stressed

How might a manager recognise stress in others?

- Individual or someone else informs manager directly or expresses concerns about an individual
- Change of behaviour, such as moodiness, irritability, fall out with colleagues
- Pattern of frequent absence and/or poor timekeeping
- Individual working excessive hours/'overdoing it'
- Standard of work falls or deadlines not met
- Lack of motivation, appearance of fatigue

Cause for Concern identified

By individual staff member

Appropriate Action for the Manager

- Contact HR
- Arrange to meet with the individual
- Read through the Manager's Good Practice Guide to Stress Management

Appropriate Action for the Individual
- Be aware of and take responsibility for own well being
- Seek support from within MDC, family and/or GP
- Arrange to meet with manager/HR
- Prepare to be open about the factors creating the stress i.e. workload, role conflict, personal
- Seek support from MDC Employee Assistance Programme

Discussion takes place between

individual member of staff, manager and a member of HR

Action Plan agreed
between individual, member of staff and manager

What to remember during the Discussion
- The manager is there to listen carefully to the individual and to understand the points being made
- During the meeting the manager will need to gather information, handle emotions, give and receive feedback, agree action
- Talk about the support that the individual is getting
- More than one meeting may be needed to give time for reflection
- Notes should be taken and retained

Action Plan: Might include

- Recognition that there is a situation which requires managing
- Commitment of both individual and manager to the plan
- Agreed specific actions with timescales
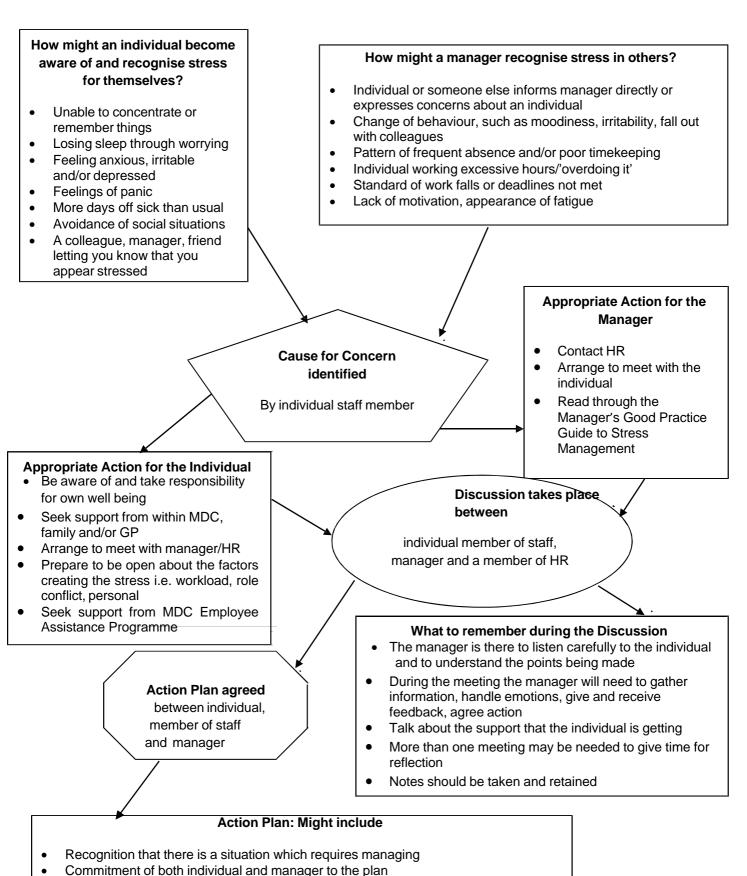- Agreed sources of support for individual
- Agreed level of confidentiality as to who should be informed and by whom
- Agreed timescale for follow up meeting

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

<div style="text-align:right">**Appendix 2**</div>

SELF ANALYSIS

RISK ASSESSMENT

This risk assessment should be undertaken in conjunction with any other generic risk assessments or as and when you are experiencing symptoms of stress at work.

The risk assessment is in two parts, the first part is a questionnaire containing six questions based on the HSE Management Standards. These questions cover the six areas that have been found to be the main sources of stress for people at work. The risk assessment is designed to establish the basic levels of stress within your particular work environment and establish if there are problem areas that may require further investigation/action.

On completion of the first questionnaire there are two outcomes:

- You are operating below an acceptable level and need to seek advice/support
- You will be directed to the most relevant additional questionnaire(s)

The second part of the questionnaire contains within it six questionnaires, each one provides more in depth analysis of the first part. You may only need to fill in one or two. An analysis of the answers is provided at the end of the second part of the questionnaire.

N.B. You can only analyse your OWN responses to this questionnaire.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Well Being at Work – Part 1

Please circle the response that you feel is most applicable to you:

Management Standard:	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Demand				
I am able to cope with the demands of my job				
Control				
I am able to have a say over the way I do my work				
Support				
I believe that I receive adequate support and information from my colleagues and superiors				
Role				
I understand my role and responsibilities within MDC				
Relationships				
I am being subjected to unacceptable behaviours (e.g. bullying) at work	Never			Often

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Change				
MDC engages staff frequently when undertaking organisational change				

For each of the six areas look at the colour and corresponding comment below:

GREEN	Acceptable – no further action required
AMBER	May need attention – if this is displayed it is important to discuss the issue identified in the question with your line manager. There is clearly room for improvement or adaptation of the procedures in place in your workplace.
RED	Priority area – should any of your answers be coloured red, this indicates that this particular area requires you to complete a second more detailed questionnaire. For example if you have a red in the area 'change' please proceed to the specific questionnaire on 'change'.

Well Being at Work – Part 2

At this stage you should have already completed the first questionnaire.

If not please return to the first section.

The first questionnaire has directed you towards a second questionnaire because one (or more) of the following areas was highlighted as a potential problem in the previous questionnaire:

- Demands
- Control
- Support
- Relationships
- Role
- Change

The next questionnaire(s) is designed to establish more specifically what those problems may be in the specific area.

N.B. As before you can analyse your OWN responses to this questionnaire

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Demands

The following four questions relate to stress caused by demands in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Please tick only one box for each question.

Do you have to work very fast?	Never/Almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Do you have to work very intensively?	Never/Almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Do you have enough time to do everything?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/Almost never

About consistency and clarity regarding your job:

Do different groups at work demand things from you that you think are hard to combine?	Never/Almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often

Control

The following fifteen questions relate to stress caused by control in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Please tick only one box for each question.

Does your job provide you with a variety of interesting thinks?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
Is your job boring?	Never/almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often

Concerning your particular work:

Do you have to do the same thing over and over again?	Never/almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Do you have the possibility of learning new things through your work?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Does your work demand a high level of skill or expertise?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Does your job require you to take the initiative?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Do you have a choice in deciding how you do your work?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Do you have a choice in deciding what you do at work?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

About your position at work: How often do these statements apply?

Others take decisions concerning my work	Never/almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
I have a good deal of say in decisions about work	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
I have a say in my own work speed	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
My working time can be flexible	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
I can decide when to take a break	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
I have a say in choosing with whom I work	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
I have a great deal of say in planning my work environment	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Support

The following six questions relate to stress caused by support in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Please only tick one box for each question. Please complete all three sections.

Support from colleagues – when you are having difficulties at work:

How often do you get help and support your colleagues?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
How often are your colleagues willing to listen to your work related problems?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Support from superiors – when you are having difficulties at work:

How often do you get help and support from your immediate superior?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
How often is your immediate superior willing to listen to your problems?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Information from superiors – about consistency and clarity regarding your job:

Do you get sufficient information from line management (your superiors)?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
Do you get consistent information from line management (your superiors)?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Relationships

The following six questions relate to stress caused by relationships in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Please tick one box for each question.

Does MDC have an effective policy to prevent unacceptable behaviour (bullying and harassment) at work?	Yes	Don't know	No
Does MDC have effective procedures that enable you to raise concerns about the behaviour of others?	Yes	Don't know	No

**Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy**

I know MDC's policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour at work	Yes	No
I am aware of the consequences of breaching the organisations policy on unacceptable behaviour at work	Yes	No

Do you work in partnership with your line manager to tackle unacceptable behaviour at work?	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
I am subjected to unacceptable behaviour at work and this has affected my health	Never/almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often

Role

The following four questions relate to stress caused by roles in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Please only tick one box for each question.

I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of MDC	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

I often have several people giving me work and I am not always clear about what I am expected to do	Never/almost never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
I have a clear plan of work which is agreed by myself and my line manager	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
I am encourages to talk to my manager at an early stage if I am not clear about my priorities or the nature of the task to be undertaken	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Change

The following four questions relate to stress caused by organisational change in your workplace. Please circle the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment.

Please only tick one box for each question.

I receive information about planned organisational	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

change at an early stage				
I am given enough information to enable me to understand why organisational change needs to happen	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
MDC communicates with employees regularly when going through change	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never
I have the opportunity to comment and ask questions about organisation change before, during and after it has happened	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never/almost never

Maldon District Council
Managing Work Related Stress Policy

Part 2 – Analysis of Answers

GREEN	Acceptable – no further action required.
AMBER	May need attention – if this is displayed it is important to discuss the issue identified in the question with your line manager. There is clearly room for improvement or adaptation of the procedures in place in your workplace.
RED	Priority area – should this colour be displayed this indicates that this particular area requires immediate attention. Carry out actions for amber and make an appointment with Occupational Health Services/Counselling Service