ALCOHOL IN THE WORKPLACE

In July 1995 the Council introduced a policy on alcohol in the workplace. This took the form of two companion leaflets, the Workplace Alcohol Policy which was issued to all staff and general Guidance for Managers which was issued to all managers. Both documents were reviewed and revised in December 1997 and they are reproduced below.

In addition more detailed guidelines were drawn up as to the most appropriate action that could be taken by managers and these are also set out below.

It is suggested that you treat these three as separate documents. Click on the relevant phrase now to jump straight to the workplace alcohol policy, the guidance for managers, or the supplementary management guidelines.

WORKPLACE ALCOHOL POLICY

Introduction

This document has been written following consultation between representatives from the five business groups of RBK&C, UNISON, GMB, Corporate Personnel and RBK&C's specialist Occupational Health Unit, Parkside, at St Mary's Hospital.

Purpose of the Workplace Policy

The purpose of this policy is to promote the sensible use of alcohol by all staff in the Council and seek to provide a safe working environment that is free from the effects of alcohol misuse.

In 1997, the Council achieved a category three Health at Work Award and undertook to review this Policy on a regular basis.

Aims of the Alcohol Policy

This policy aims to:

- maintain and enhance a safe working environment for all staff by raising awareness of the risks and possible harm associated with alcohol misuse
- challenge the cultural acceptance of alcohol and highlight its negative effects on performance, service delivery and health and safety. The majority of people who drink enjoy it without experiencing problems. It is the sensible use of alcohol that the policy aims to promote
- encourage staff who feel concerned about their drinking to express that concern to an appropriate person or agency
- provide consistent and relevant guidelines, assistance and training, where necessary, for managers and staff regarding sensible drinking and alcohol misuse

This policy applies to all RBK&C employees and should be read in conjunction with local rules, relevant legislation and any relevant professional codes of conduct.
Promotion of Appropriate Drinking

In order to achieve the aims of the policy staff will:

receive information and awareness raising opportunities relating to the sensible use of alcohol

receive a copy of the policy. Health information and awareness raising programmes will be built into existing workplace events e.g. the staff health fair and lunchtime seminars

have the choice of low alcohol and alcohol free drinks at all Council events and celebratory occasions. Alternatives to alcohol will always be made available. The aim is to provide opportunities for sensible drinking by the provision of a wider choice at Council functions.

receive information and guidance on how they can find confidential help within RBK&C, through the Occupational Health Service and outside the organisation regarding an alcohol issue

The policy also requires managers to be provided with training to equip them with the skills required to implement the policy. This should be achieved through existing courses for managers offered by Staff Development Associates (SDA) at Pembroke Road (e.g. Managing People and Managing Staff Performance). These courses will be reviewed and upgraded as necessary through consultation with SDA, Environmental Health Promotion and representatives from Group Personnel departments.

Alcohol in the Workplace

Alcohol should not be consumed by staff during working hours. Staff are encouraged not to drink during breaks as this may impair performance. It is accepted that there will be celebratory occasions (e.g. staff departure, Christmas) when staff will wish to drink. This policy seeks to ensure that this may happen but only when authorised by the appropriate head of department. Such occasions should be organised with respect to time of day, staff rotas and sensitivity to the public.

Staff whose work involves driving, operating plant or machinery or working with power tools must not consume alcohol before coming on duty or during meal breaks.

If alcohol consumption is authorised by a head of department, organisers, or those responsible for an event, should ensure that non-alcohol or low alcohol drinks should be available, as well as alcoholic ones, and a sensible limit should be placed on the amount of alcohol available.

If a manager is given reason to doubt an employee's capability for work as a result of alcohol consumption, the employee should be sent home. Consideration should be given to the disciplinary procedure. The manager should see the employee at the beginning of the next working day and the appropriate action taken (see section 6).
No part of this policy should supersedes existing local rules, the code of conduct or the employee disciplinary code.

**Responsibilities of Managers**

If a manager suspects or is made aware that a member of staff is experiencing difficulties with alcohol, the manager should encourage the member of staff to discuss this problem and seek help. The problem should be addressed with sensitivity and in confidence. Managers should remind staff of the Alcohol Policy and inform them of the various agencies which can offer help.

Manager initiated referrals to Occupational Health for assessment will take place when there is deteriorating job performance or unsatisfactory conduct resulting from apparent health or behavioural problems linked with alcohol use. This referral process is detailed in Section F9(4) of the Managers Guidance Notes’ and covered in the courses covered by SDA.

A manager must respond positively when made aware of alcohol misuse and respect the individual needs of a member of staff experiencing difficulties.

**Responsibilities of Staff**

The Council expects all staff to report for work and remain in a fit and safe condition to perform their duties. Under the ‘Health and Safety at Work Act 1974’ employees are required to take reasonable care of themselves and of other persons who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work.

Employees should be familiar with the aims and procedures of this policy and should comply with a referral decision by their manager regarding assessment for an alcohol problem.

Employees should be encouraged to refer themselves for help for an alcohol problem. Information on helping agencies will be circulated to all managers. Staff should be encouraged to attend any health related events where alcohol information and education is available.

Failure to comply with a manager's referral decision or maintain a satisfactory level of performance may result in disciplinary action.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The policy will be monitored regularly by the HAWA group every eighteen months.

**Units of Alcohol and Sensible Drinking**

Sensible drinking limits are expressed in terms of units. A unit of alcohol is defined as being 8 grammes or 10 millilitres of pure alcohol. This is roughly equivalent to half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider, 3% - 4% (Alcohol by Volume) ABV, one small glass of wine or sherry, 11% ABV, or one pub measure of spirits, 37% ABV. Drinking too much can be harmful.

- PINT OF BEER - TWO UNITS
The following daily benchmarks have been recommended by the Health Education Authority as a guide to how much you can drink without putting your health at risk.

For Men:

drinking less than 4 units a day has no significant risk to your health

For Women:

drinking less than 3 units a day has no significant risk to your health

The HEA maintain that alcohol will have a greater effect on women as they are generally smaller and lighter, their bodies contain less water and their metabolism is different.

However, these benchmarks are not targets to drink up to. There are times and circumstances when it makes sense not to drink at all.

IT TAKES THE BODY ROUGHLY ONE HOUR TO BURN OFF ONE UNIT OF ALCOHOL

While research indicates that a certain amount of alcohol may have health benefits, managers should remember that alcohol is a central nervous system depressant - a sedative drug which may inhibit performance, efficiency and effectiveness. Its effects can be accelerated in combination with other sedative drugs such as antihistamines (allergy, cold and travel sickness medicines) or medically prescribed tranquillisers (such as valium). In large amounts, for example bingeing or prolonged heavy drinking of alcohol, the risk of long term damage to your health will be increased.

It is not intended that the policy should attempt to define ‘sensible drinking’ or ‘alcohol misuse’ as these are complex and difficult to define. However, for the purposes of clarity this policy bases the notion of ‘sensible drinking’ on the daily low risk limits for men and women of 4 and 3 units of alcohol respectively recommended by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority.

INDEPENDENT ALCOHOL AGENCIES

The following is a list of selected agencies which can offer help of various kinds to someone experiencing a problem with alcohol or to their partner and family:

ACCEPT
724 Fulham Road
London SW6 5SE
0171-371-7477 (client services)
0171-371-7555 (administration)
(Offers services in education, prevention, training and treatment for people with an alcohol problem, their families and friends. Services include drop-in and abstinence groups, individual counselling, support groups. Self-referrals.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
0171-352-3001
(telephone in the first instance for an information pack and meeting details)

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS
0171-403-0888

24 hour Helpline offering support for families and friends of problem drinkers. Leaflets and publications also available on this number.

ALCOHOL HELPLINE
0171-332-0202

CORE TRUST
Lisson Cottages
35A Lisson Grove
London NW1 6UD
0171-258-3031
Holistic treatment day centre for addiction release offering counselling, complementary therapies, acupuncture detoxification and rehabilitation, structured day programme open 7 days a week.

THE REDCLIFFE PROJECT
11 Redcliffe Gardens
London SW10
0171-352-2552
Contact: Sue Mercer
Individual counselling sessions, men’s and women’s groups, for people with alcohol and/or drug dependency in their first year of recovery.

WORKPLACE ALCOHOL POLICY
GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Aim
To enable the implementation of the workplace alcohol policy through guidance and clarification.

Objectives
Managers should

understand the workplace alcohol policy and its primary aim of promoting the health, safety and welfare of Council staff and those with whom they work

be aware of the effects of alcohol consumption in the workplace and on general staff performance and health

be able to identify deteriorating work performance or absenteeism on account of possible alcohol misuse and know how to direct employees towards professional help as soon as a problem is suspected
Promotion of Appropriate Drinking

As part of ongoing workplace health initiatives, staff are encouraged to attend workplace events where information on the sensible use of alcohol is available. Managers are asked to encourage staff to attend specific health events such as the annual staff Health Fair or a lunchtime health seminar.

Where managers have given agreement to alcohol consumption in the workplace, such as at Christmas or a staff departure party, care should be taken to ensure:

- adequate cover is available to deal with routine public enquiries
- low alcohol and alcohol free drinks are also available
- a sensible limit is placed on the total amount of alcohol consumed
- the timing of these celebratory events should be such that they do not reduce the quality of Council services

Please note that the consumption of alcohol is not permitted in the workplace without the express permission of a manager or his/her deputy.

Alcohol in the Workplace

The Workplace Alcohol Policy is concerned with:

- promoting the sensible use of alcohol
- controlling the consumption of alcohol in the workplace
- helping staff with an alcohol problem to seek help

Any member of staff whose work involves driving, operating plant or machinery or power tools must not consume alcohol before coming on duty or during meal breaks. Attention is also drawn to the fact that a person can still be under the effects of alcohol following heavy drinking the night before (see page 4 of this booklet).

Staff are expected to arrive for work in a fit condition to perform their duties and to remain so until the working day is completed. Staff should be discouraged from drinking at lunchtime as this may impair performance.

Managers are not expected to "check" if staff have been drinking. The tone of the Workplace Alcohol Policy is intended to promote an understanding of the ways in which alcohol is linked to poor performance, ill-health and absenteeism.

Where Managers have given permission for alcohol consumption in the workplace, staff should not be expected to return to their duties that day. Managers should refer to section G2, para 2.2 of the Manager's Guidance Notes which states that the Council considers..."sleeping on duty or being under the influence of alcohol " as misconduct and appropriate action should be taken. Prior to the taking of formal action, it is normal practice for managers or supervisors to deal with problems on an informal basis initially.

If a member of staff has an alcohol problem, it should be treated in the same way as a health problem. The member of staff should be encouraged to seek the advice of the Occupational Health Service through referral by the manager or by their own G.P. A list of
independent alcohol agencies is also given at the end of this guidance and managers should encourage staff to self-refer.

**The Role of Managers**

The Workplace Alcohol Policy does not supersede existing local rules, relevant legislation or professional codes of conduct. The Workplace Alcohol Policy is intended to draw attention to the potential effects of alcohol on staff health and performance and to existing information and documentation. Managers and staff need to be aware of the Council's "Guide to Customer Care".

Managers are required to:

be familiar with existing procedures and guidance and ensure staff are conversant with the alcohol policy and understand what is expected of them

set a good example through the responsible use of alcohol

be aware of the effects of alcohol misuse

monitor changes in work performance and attendance, sickness and accident patterns

be aware of, and identify, any aspects of the work situation which could contribute to alcohol misuse and seek to modify them

refer staff for assistance as appropriate through their own personnel section, to their own G.P. or to an independent alcohol agency

intervene early and sensitively when there are signs of problems. This can be best achieved by adopting a non-judgmental approach and using sensitive interviewing skills to find out whether alcohol is the underlying cause of work problems

**Units of Alcohol and Sensible Drinking**

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GUIDENCES, CODES AND COURSES

Guidances
Managers Guidance Notes
Your Guide to Customer Care

Codes of Safe Working
Council Vehicle Drivers
Council Moped and Motor Cycle Riders

Courses
Managing Misconduct
Managing Poor Performance
Managing Sickness Absence

GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are part of a positive Council approach to dealing with the issue of alcohol in the workplace. They provide a framework for dealing with alcohol misuse where:

an employee approaches their manager to seek help,

it has an impact on an employee's health and attendance at work or

it affects an employee's performance or conduct and thereby has an effect on service provision or the Council's image.

AIMS

The aims of these guidelines are;

to raise manager's awareness of the possibility of alcohol misuse amongst staff

to help managers identify symptoms indicating possible alcohol misuse

to raise manager's awareness of the range of alcohol problems and their impact on employee's performance and well-being

to guide managers as to the most appropriate action

SELF-REFERRAL

It is not the role of the manager or any personnel officer to offer counselling and/or treatment for employees with alcohol misuse. If an employee has approached you to seek help with an alcohol misuse problem then you should
Explore with the individual the nature of the problem and the possible causes.

Explore the sources of help available to the individual - this will involve taking advice from your group personnel section.

Identify whether the nature of their job contributes in any way to their problem.

Identify whether there are any implications for their work - e.g. are they operating heavy machinery or driving Council vehicles? Are they working with clients who themselves have an alcohol misuse problem?

Agree an action plan which may include seeking a commitment to getting professional help.

Monitor and review the employee's progress through regular discussion. [See below for an extended discussion of Monitoring and Reviewing]

TACKLING ALCOHOL MISUSE

Employees will not always approach you if they have an alcohol misuse problem. However, if you have concerns about possible alcohol misuse then the following three stages should be followed;

identify the symptoms

explore the problem and identify the causes

identify the appropriate intervention and take any necessary action

IDENTIFYING THE SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL MISUSE

Alcohol misuse may lead to impaired performance, increasing levels of sickness due to alcohol-related illnesses or hangovers and/or misconduct. The following list of symptoms may be signs that an employee is drinking too much. However, it is inadvisable for you to "diagnose" anyone as having an alcohol related problem solely on the basis of these symptoms.

Emotional symptoms may include mood swings, depression, irritability and demotivation.

Behavioural symptoms may include higher levels of sickness absence, carelessness leading to accidents, difficulty in concentrating, missing work deadlines or reduced work performance.

Physical symptoms may include tremors, alcohol on the breath, specific alcohol-related illnesses.

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM AND IDENTIFYING CAUSES
Alcohol misuse may be particularly difficult to identify for two main reasons;

people who misuse alcohol may not be aware that they have a problem and/or may strongly deny that they have a problem.

alcohol misuse may be manifest in a number of symptoms including poor performance, ill health and/or misconduct.

If you, as a manager, suspect alcohol misuse is a problem then you will need to meet with the employee to try and discover the real cause. This initial meeting is exploratory in nature and should seek to encourage the employee to identify for themselves if there is an alcohol misuse problem. There are a number of “golden rules” that will help to create the right environment for discovering the cause:-

Arrange a meeting in a room where, and at a time when, you won't be disturbed.

Assure the employee of the confidentiality of your discussions. Any discussions should remain confidential between you and the employee - the aim is to try and encourage the employee to seek help for themselves. [However see the further discussion of confidentiality below]

Avoid confrontational, “across the desk” positions.

Avoid judgmental and emotive statements.

Have the facts at your fingertips - e.g. number of days sickness, examples of poor performance - e.g. number of invoices processed, etc. These are essential if you are challenged about your observations of the employee's health or performance record.

Ask open questions such as how, why, what, tell me more about...?

Listen attentively and do not interrupt - allow space for the employee to speak and do not rush to fill in the pauses.

Check your understanding of what they are saying by trying to summarise what they have said.

If you are not sure what they mean try and clarify by asking further questions

Seek an agreed outcome from the meeting - i.e. seek agreement about the nature and cause(s) of the problems and seek agreement about the next stage forward.

CAUSES

Both the workplace environment and domestic circumstances can contribute to levels of stress which may make people more prone to rely on alcohol.

In the workplace some of the commonest factors are irregular or long hours, unsupervised or monotonous work, peer pressure, under or over-promotion, etc.

In an employee's home or social life factors may include marital or family breakdown, illness or bereavement, financial problems, etc.
Finally it should be noted that there are a number of different patterns of alcohol misuse ranging from "one-off" incidents, through bingeing to daily dependence on alcohol. Managers should not seek to categorise staff but should be aware of the range of alcohol problems particularly where it seems that the employee is dependent on alcohol.

**INTERVENTIONS**

If it has been established that there is a problem then the form of any subsequent intervention will depend on;

whether the employee accepts that there is an alcohol misuse problem and whether they are prepared to seek help.

whether the fact that they have an alcohol misuse problem influences the outcome of any disciplinary process.

**Is the Employee denying an alcohol misuse problem?**

If the employee denies that there is an alcohol misuse problem then the manager has no alternative but to proceed with the Council's normal procedures for dealing with poor performance, etc.

**Is the Employee accepting that there is an alcohol misuse problem?**

If the employee has accepted that there is an alcohol misuse problem and that this has contributed to their poor performance, etc. then the manager should

- discuss what help may be available and if necessary seek a referral to a specialist agency for help.
- set out the standards of performance/conduct/attendance expected.
- set out the consequences if no improvements are made - the consequence of a failure to improve would be a resumption of the Council's normal procedures and may, ultimately, lead to dismissal.
- agree an action plan and establish a period for improvement.
- monitor the employee's performance/etc. during the review period.
- review the employee's performance/etc. at the end of the review period.
MONITORING AND REVIEW

The primary aim of any intervention in these circumstances is to achieve an improvement in the employee's conduct, performance, or attendance. Both parties need to be clear what change is expected and what the consequences would be if this change is not made. If the performance, conduct or attendance displayed by the individual is not acceptable their employment could, ultimately, be at risk.

Where an employee has agreed to seek professional, external, help advice should be sought from the help agency when setting a timetable for improvement. This need not be the sole determining factor, however, and managers should also consider internal factors, such as the needs of the service, and any health and safety implications. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to seek a temporary transfer of duties to protect the welfare of the individual, colleagues and members of the public.

If the programme devised by the help agency is abandoned it may be appropriate to bring forward the review process as the review date is likely to have been set taking account of the original programme. If the programme is adjusted it may also be appropriate to reconsider the review process.

It is not possible to prescribe a set time for reviewing progress and the period set should take account of the individual circumstances. Ideally review periods should not be further apart than every three months as it may lead to the problem worsening without your knowledge. It is unlikely that there will be a full improvement in three months but the manager should acknowledge any improvements that are made and continue to monitor the employee's progress.

If insufficient improvement is achieved over the agreed time scale then advice should be sought from your Group Personnel section. At this stage it may be appropriate to follow the Council's established procedures for ill health, poor performance or misconduct as appropriate.

Similarly if the employee abandons their course of treatment and there is no improvement in their performance then the relevant procedure for dealing with poor performance, etc. should be followed. Abandonment of the treatment in, and of itself, is not grounds for disciplinary action.

CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no obligation on an employee to disclose that they have an alcohol misuse problem although if they are intending to seek professional treatment then they will need to discuss the arrangements for time off with their manager.

If the employee has disclosed to their manager that they have an alcohol misuse problem then the content of these discussions should normally remain confidential between the employee and their manager.

If the employee receives counselling or treatment from an alcohol specialist then it is likely that the content of these discussions will remain confidential. However, the manager should expect feedback about the employee's general progress and their fitness for work.
If it is necessary to resort to formal Council procedures and the employee offers alcohol misuse as mitigation then further discussions will be needed, as part of those procedures, about the nature of the problem and whether help has been sought and persevered with.