

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Personnel Committee - 13 March 2006

REPORT ON: Policy on Managing Stress in the Workplace

REPORT BY: Assistant Chief Executive (Management)

REPORT NO: 83-2006

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek the Committee's approval of the proposed Policy on Managing Stress in the Workplace.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the attached Policy on Managing Stress in the Workplace attached as Appendix 1 which is required following the Health and Safety Executive's Audit of Stress Management conducted earlier this year within the Council.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The costs of implementing the Plan will be funded from existing departmental budgets.

4 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 As part of the continuing process of reviewing employment policies, the Policy on Stress in the Workplace has been revised and updated to incorporate current guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the organisational factors which affect occupational stress, and includes a Stress Assessment Tool to assist management in identifying and addressing areas of concern.
- 6.2 The revised policy has been re-titled "Policy on Managing Stress in the Workplace".

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The Council Management Team and Trade Unions have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None.

J C Petrie
Assistant Chief Executive (Management)

6 March 2006

POLICY ON MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a complex subject and the term “stress” is often misused and misunderstood. The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”.

Dundee City Council recognises that work brings its own set of tasks, demands, responsibilities, problems and pressures. Pressure is a fact of modern life and no job is completely free of pressure. Certain levels of pressure can be beneficial in providing challenges, motivation and job satisfaction. The Council recognises that excessive workplace pressures may be harmful to the well being of individuals if sustained over a long period of time and can lead to a detrimental effect upon service delivery.

As an employer, Dundee City Council has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that the workplace is safe and healthy. Under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999, employers are obliged to assess the nature and scale of risks in the workplace, identify appropriate controls and take action where this is necessary. These risks may be psychological as well as physical.

The Council also recognises that external pressures in an employee's personal life, such as debt or personal relationships, can produce stress, which may impinge on the employment situation.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Dundee City Council is committed to improving the health and well being of its employees by introducing and promoting policies to encourage healthier lifestyles. All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to ensure that the health of employees is not placed at risk through excessive pressures in the workplace by undertaking, and acting upon, stress risk assessments. The Council will encourage and actively promote a supportive environment where employees as individuals, are able to seek help and advice when experiencing stress symptoms, whether or not these are work-related.

3. COMMITMENT

The Council will take reasonable steps to ensure that an employee's health is not put at risk through excessive and sustained levels of pressure arising from the way work is organised, the way people deal with each other, or from the day to day demands placed on the workforce. Employees will also have a responsibility to contribute to this positive way of working.

Primary responsibility for ensuring workloads are not excessive lies with managers and supervisors through the implementation of effective management practices, which collectively prevent or reduce the likelihood of stress. Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to respond timeously to any concerns raised or identified.

Heads of departments will be responsible for undertaking stress risk assessments for employees and acting upon the results. The Stress Assessment Tool, see Appendix 1A, has been provided to assist departments to undertake this activity.

The Stress Assessment Tool has been developed by the Health and Safety Executive to enable an employer to measure how the workforce rates its performance in managing the risks associated with work related stress.

Individual employees also have a clear responsibility, with a duty to themselves and others, to minimise pressures by acting reasonably and responsibly and to raise work problems with managers.

The Council requires Heads of Departments to ensure that:

- managers and supervisors consider potential stress impact when organising work;
- managers and supervisors use the Stress Assessment Tool to identify hazards which may cause stress within their department;
- managers, supervisors and employees are aware of control measures available to reduce the risk of stress;
- the risk of stress from isolated and repetitive tasks is minimised;
- employees are encouraged to identify, and report to management, stress in themselves and others;
- good management and supervision is encouraged at all levels within the organisation;
- managers, supervisors and employees are aware of the causes and effects of stress through the provision of appropriate information and training as required;
- stress management training is undertaken by the senior and middle management and all managers and supervisors who supervise more than five employees;
- managers and supervisors are aware of sources of help and support available for employees and, where appropriate, seek this support for employees.

The Council will develop suitable training packages for managers and supervisors using on-line training, etc.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

Heads of Department should adopt good management practices to reduce or control the pressures placed on employees. Managers and supervisors in all departments will be trained to implement the policy and to understand the causes of stress in the people working for them. Managers and supervisors should also be aware of stress within themselves and the impact this can have on others. Employees should also be aware of the signs of stress within themselves and seek appropriate support (see below "Sources of Support"). Further advice and guidance can be obtained by contacting the Personnel Department, with regard to implementing the policy.

Regular contact between managers and supervisors and the employees they manage will assist in the recognition of stress-related symptoms.

Managers and Supervisors must:-

- Assess the risks of stress in each job/activity and take all reasonable steps to address hazards causing stress
- Ensure that employees are trained and competent in their jobs and able to fulfil their roles
- Allocate workloads and targets which are reasonable and achievable
- Provide supervision and support within an appropriate environment and organisational structure
- Ensure good communications and consultations with employees, particularly during periods of change
- Be aware of the symptoms of stress, and, if an employee appears to be affected, offer support and assistance.

Employees should:-

- prioritise and organise work, wherever possible, to allow sufficient time for each task
- seek the assistance of their manager/supervisor at an early stage if work problems arise
- seek help and assistance in the event of sustained periods of pressure or where stress symptoms exist
- be encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle by sensible eating and drinking, exercise, recreational activities and sufficient sleep.

5. ACTION TO AVOID STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

There is no single or best way to prevent harmful levels of work-related pressure, which could be applied in every circumstance. Managers and supervisors should adopt a systematic and problem-solving approach. Risks and hazards should be assessed and practical steps taken to remove or minimise them. Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring stress risk assessments are undertaken and that organisational controls are kept under review. To assist Departments to review existing stress risk assessments or to undertake new stress risk assessments the HSE's Stress Assessment Tool contained in Appendix 1A should be followed to identify potential causes of occupational stress. If, and when, these are identified, it is the responsibility of management to address the issues by completing a Stress Management Action Plan, a pro forma is attached as Annex 3 of Appendix 1A. The stress assessment tool is aimed at addressing the organisational factors that could give rise to occupational stress.

The appropriate steps taken to tackle stress depend upon individual circumstances, and may need to take account of whether a problem affects an individual or a work section. Action in the following areas may assist in minimising pressures:

Effective Communication: open, informative face-to-face communication that is honest and consistent to avoid the pressure of "not knowing". Establish systems that encourage two-way communication and check that communications with staff have been received and understood. Consult and involve staff at the earliest appropriate stage in decisions which affect them.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities: ensure tasks and responsibilities are well defined with plenty of variety where possible. Set clear and achievable targets which employees are trained and equipped to achieve, in order to avoid the pressure of "can't do that". Through consultation, seek to negotiate an efficient and effective solution to workload problems.

Reasonable Workloads: monitor and review incoming, on-going and completed work; plan workload and allocation of resources to avoid the pressure of "too much work, or not enough work." Promote flexible working arrangements. Ensure that employees take annual holidays and work breaks (e.g. lunch breaks) to avoid fatigue. Prioritise workload and delegate appropriately.

Supervision: ensure regular supervision of employees in order to respond promptly to problems. Provide positive feedback and recognition of good performance when appropriate. Discuss poor performance promptly, honestly and constructively to agree appropriate action. Undertake Staff Development Review meetings annually.

6. SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Employees who feel under excessive pressure and suspect that they are experiencing stress symptoms and wish to seek help and advice, have a number of options:

- access help privately through their own GP and/or directly to appropriate specialist counselling such as Citizens Advice, debt/money advice projects, Samaritans etc;
- request a private and confidential meeting with their manager/supervisor or a Personnel Officer who will arrange appropriate counselling or medical advice, or will provide information on other sources of help and support available. Where the Medical Adviser advises that a course of counselling or other treatment is undertaken, the employee will be granted paid time off or leave;
- arrange an appointment with the Council's Employee Support Adviser;
- seek advice or guidance from their Trade Union;
- discuss with manager/supervisor the suitability of the "Coping with Stress" Course.

Managers and supervisors who believe that an employee is experiencing stress, should discuss the matter with the individual and offer appropriate support and assistance, as above. There are a number of ways potential stress problems can be identified:-

- through one to one meetings with employees, such as Staff Development Reviews;
- as a result of the manager/supervisor's personal knowledge of individual employees and observation of their general behaviour and demeanour;
- from the findings of previous stress risk assessments;
- from investigations into unsatisfactory conduct, performance or attendance;
- in the course of formal disciplinary, performance or absence management meetings.

Protections

- The confidentiality of any records of employees' stress conditions will be strictly preserved.
- Employees will be granted paid time off or leave, where appropriate, for approved counselling and/or treatment.
- Where stress emerges as a possible factor during the course of formal disciplinary, performance or absence hearings, the hearing may be adjourned to allow further investigation/assessment. When these investigations are completed, the adjourned hearing will be reconvened. The original complaints against the employee will be dealt with, taking due account of all the relevant evidence, including any on the extent to which stress may have played a part and the individual's willingness to address the issues.
- Where employees with stress are being dealt with under the Council's procedures on Discipline and Sub Standard Work Performance or Sickness Absence Management, all rights conferred by these procedures will be maintained, including that of accompaniment by a colleague or trade union representative.

The above protections, where applicable, are subject to the following conditions:-

- The employee co-operates with counselling or medical advice.
- An employee who refuses to accept counselling and/or medical advice will continue to be the subject of any disciplinary, performance or absence process, which may result in redeployment to a more suitable post, ill health retirement or dismissal.

7. REVIEW

Managers and supervisors should continue to review and monitor areas of work where action has been taken to assess the effectiveness of the steps taken and to determine any further action required.

Heads of Departments are also encouraged to periodically review any stress issues during team briefings, or any similar meetings, and provide employees with an opportunity to discuss progress and raise any concerns.

The policy will be reviewed by the Assistant Chief Executive (Management) on a regular basis.

January 2006

STRESS ASSESSMENT TOOL

Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has identified six organisational factors, which have an effect on occupational stress, namely: Demand; Control; Support; Relationships; Role and Change. The HSE has produced benchmark management standards, which enable employers to gauge performance in the management of stress, as follows:

The management standards will be used to determine the present position with regard to managing stress and help identify any problem areas to develop action plans. Organisations will have achieved the stress management standard if they attain satisfaction rates as follows: -

Demand - 85%
Control - 85%
Support - 85%
Relationships - 65%
Role - 65%
Change - 65%

Stress Assessment Tool

The Stress Assessment Tool focuses on the organisational factors in relation to the management standards identified by the HSE and assists in the identification of potential areas of concern.

The Stress Assessment Tool involves undertaking a First Pass Assessment. Employees are asked to complete a short questionnaire with seven questions, one on each of the factors, and one on individual concerns (see Annex 1). If the results at this stage show that the satisfaction rates for occupational factors are being achieved, then there is no need to undertake the Second Pass Assessment. The results of First Pass Assessment should be discussed with the relevant safety representatives in that Department, and if it is considered that a particular result is low, it may still be advantageous to issue the Second Pass Assessment for that particular category.

If the results show that the perception of employees is that systems are not in place to respond to local concerns, then management will have to ensure that suitable procedures are devised and/or communicated to employees.

If the satisfaction rates fall below the required standards, then the employees are asked to complete a Second Pass Assessment questionnaire for the factor(s) where the standards have not been met. This questionnaire contains 6 or 7 more detailed questions on the relevant factor. (See Annex 2.)

When these questionnaires are returned, a nominated facilitator will meet with a representative group from those who completed the Second Pass Assessment, and an action plan will be drawn up to address the relevant issues. (See Annex 3.)

Procedure

1. First a decision has to be made on how to group the department's employees to ensure a meaningful assessment is possible. It is advised that the groups be defined by function or role and location, but it is advisable to consult with departmental safety representatives regarding this matter. Line managers will be included in the group but will not see the completed questionnaires.
2. Questionnaires will be completed anonymously by all employees, and returned to a nominated officer in the department who is independent of the group, and who has completed the "Stress and the Risk Management Process" on-line training course. This officer will evaluate and determine whether the second questionnaire requires to be issued.
3. Where a second questionnaire is required, it will be issued by the nominated officer, who will facilitate the process.
4. On receipt of the second set of completed questionnaires, the nominated officer/facilitator will arrange a focus group with a representative selection of employees from the team/group involved. The manager of the team should not be part of the focus group.
5. The focus group, with the assistance and guidance of the facilitator, will produce an outline action plan to address the issues identified by the group.
6. The facilitator will then meet with the group's manager(s) and a written action plan will be finalised, approved and issued to all relevant employees.

First Pass Assessment Tool

Please tick the answers that you consider to be the most appropriate.

Department	
Section	

Demand	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I believe that I am able to cope with the demands of the job.			

Control	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I am able to have a say about the way I do my work.			

Support	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I believe that I receive adequate support and information from my colleagues and supervisors.			

Relationships	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I am not subject to bullying or other unacceptable behaviours.			

Role	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I believe that I understand my role and responsibilities.			

Change	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
I believe that the Department consults employees when undergoing organisational change.			

Individual Concerns	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Disagree
Systems are in place locally to respond to individual concerns.			

Comments

Second Pass Assessment Tool

Please tick the answers that you consider to be the most appropriate.

Department	
Section	

Demand	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
I am able to do what is expected of me.				
I am clear about my role and responsibilities.				
I have the necessary competencies to undertake the core functions of my job.				
I find some aspects of my job interesting.				
Adequate controls are in place to protect my health and safety.				
I am provided with a good physical working environment where risks are adequately controlled.				
There are mechanisms at work available to raise health and safety concerns.				

Control	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Generally Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have a say in the manner that my work is done.				
Measures are in place to prevent me from having to work at a forced pace.				
I am encouraged to develop my own skills in the workplace. eg. training opportunities				
I am given support when undertaking new tasks.				
I have a degree of control over when I have breaks from work.				
I am encouraged to make suggestions to improve the working environment or the way work is done.				

Support	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Generally Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I often get support and help from colleagues.				
I find that colleagues are willing to listen to my work related problems.				
I often get support and help from my immediate supervisor.				
I find that my immediate supervisor is willing to listen to my problems.				
I get sufficient information from line management (supervisors).				
I get consistent information from line management (supervisors).				

Relationships	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Generally Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Procedures do exist to resolve conflict in the workplace.				
Procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour in the workplace are well communicated.				
Measures exist in the workplace to ensure that teams are working together to clear objectives.				
Adequate consideration is given to lone working.				
I feel the Council or department is supportive during a crisis. eg. bereavement				
I am encouraged to talk to my line supervisor, or employee representative about any behaviours causing concern.				
Working together as a team is encouraged in my workplace.				

Role	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Generally Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Systems exist to raise concerns about any uncertainties or potential conflicts with regard to my role or responsibilities.				
I have a clear understanding of my role in the workplace.				
I receive the training I need to do my job.				
I receive formal feedback from my supervisor regarding my performance.				
I am clear about my lines of reporting.				
I am provided with positive feedback when something goes well.				

Change	Strongly Agree	Generally Agree	Generally Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reasons for proposed changes are usually given.				
I receive adequate communications during the change process.				
I believe adequate employee consultation is built into the change process where employees can comment on the proposals.				
I am informed of the impact of organisational change on my job.				
I am usually informed in advance of the timescale for proposed changes.				
I receive support during the change process.				

If there is a cause of concern that you consider has not yet been resolved please explain in the space below.

--

Stress Management Action Plan

Department:	Address:
Approved by:	Date:

Section	Issue	Action	Target Date	Completion Date