

personnel/stress strategic plan

MANAGEMENT OF STRESS

STRATEGIC PLAN

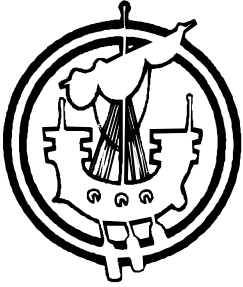
Human Resources Section
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MANAGEMENT OF STRESS – STRATEGIC PLAN

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Stress is one of the biggest health issues at work today. Stress is also difficult to measure. While much stress can be caused by factors such as relationships, health and noisy neighbours, work is still one of the main causes of stress. Stress at work can also compound problems which result from stress caused by personal factors.

PLAN

- 2.1 This document details the proposed plan to introduce a Stress Prevention Policy within the Comhairle. A summary of the Action Plan is detailed in Paragraph 10.1.

POLICY

- 3.1 The first step in developing an effective management system which is proactive with an emphasis on prevention, not just reactive, is the introduction of a Stress Prevention Policy.

The Stress Prevention Policy will be approved after full consultation with Safety Representatives, Trade Union groups, employee groups and Elected Members.

The proposed consultation document is attached at Appendix 1.

TRAINING

- 4.1 Relevant training in stress management is essential. This includes training for all Managers (including Head Teachers) and employees and stress prevention being part of the induction training.

It is proposed that a training programme be put in place by December 2004.

JOB DESCRIPTION

- 5.1 The introduction of the management of health and safety and stress management shall be included in the job descriptions of all relevant management postholders.

Each Head of Department will review the management of stress within his/her department in relation to specific Health & Safety tasks being added to Job Descriptions.

DEVELOP A PROGRAMME TO IDENTIFY THE HAZARDS AND TAKING ACTION

6.1 Risk assessment is at the heart of any plan to reduce the risk of workplace stress. Before a risk assessment is undertaken the following steps must be completed:

- communicate with employees about work-related stress, what can be looked for and be identified
- explain the assistance to be provided (i.e. trade union/employee representatives, Health & Safety Officer, Line Managers and Occupational Health)
- explain to employees what is hoped to be achieved, the first step being a risk assessment
- agree a date for key findings of the risk assessment.

6.2 The risk assessment should then follow five steps. These are as follows.

Identify the hazards. Before doing anything the employer has to find out if there is a problem. There are seven broad categories of risk factors for work related stress: culture, demands, control, relationships, change, role, and the support, training and other factors unique to the individual.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) recommends that employers identify the hazards using a variety of methods including looking at sickness records, using focus groups and using questionnaires.

Decide who can be harmed. Work-related stress can affect any member of staff. However, some staff may be more vulnerable than others because of their job or if they are returning to work after a domestic crisis or illness. It is important that measures to combat stress do not focus on any particular individuals who employers feel may be more likely to become ill, and instead relate to the work of the organisation as a whole.

Evaluate the risk. Basically the employer has to look at what action they are already taking, decide whether it is enough, and if any additional action is required.

It is at this point that the employer has to decide what measures they need to take to remove or reduce the levels of stress within the organisation.

The HSE says that, in controlling risks, employers must apply the principles below and in the following order:

- avoid risks (e.g. make the work environment safer so that staff are not anxious about the threat of violence)
- combat risks at source (e.g. by organising the work sensibly and giving people clear roles)
- adapt the work to the individual, especially in workplace design, the choice of work equipment and the choice of working methods, to alleviate monotonous work and work at a predetermined rate, and to reduce their effect on health

- develop a coherent overall preventative policy which covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors relating to the working environment
- give collective protective measures priority over individual protective measures (e.g. by tackling stress at source, rather than just providing information and training to individuals, or access to an employee assistance programme)
- give appropriate instructions to employees.

It is important that Safety Representatives ensure that employers do not look at individual protective measures, such as employer assistance programmes, before they have looked at the six previous principles.

Record the significant findings of the assessment. All employers should already be conducting risk assessments and recording the findings. It is therefore very easy for stress to be included within these risk assessments, or at least recorded in a similar way.

Review the assessment at appropriate intervals. The HSE recommends that the assessment is reviewed every six months initially, and then annually if there are no significant changes.

- 6.3 The number of risk assessments carried out in each Department in relation to stress will be reported to the Departmental Safety Committees who will ensure that an initial review of each risk assessment is undertaken after six months and reviewed thereafter each year.

DEVELOP PROGRAMME FOR CARING FOR EMPLOYEES WITH WORK RELATED STRESS

- 7.1 A programme must be developed which consists of two parts:

- (1) providing help
- (2) rehabilitation

Help can be provided in the following ways:

- a change of, or changes in the job
- more training
- more support
- more flexibility in how the job is being done
- access to independent counselling

- 7.2 Support measures such as counselling, on their own, are not enough. In addition to these, Line Managers will provide support where problems have developed and, where necessary, refer the person on for further help.

- 7.3 In relation to Rehabilitation this will include arrangements to have an early return to work interview in addition to a phased return to work as approved by Occupational Health.

STRESS AUDIT

- 8.1 Each Departmental Safety Committee should consider requesting a Stress Audit to be undertaken within their Department. Stress Audits will be arranged through the Health & Safety Officer/Occupational Health Service.

AFTERMATH OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

- 9.1 Nothing can adequately prepare organisations or individuals for the experience of a traumatic incident because by definition it is outside the 'normal' experience.

Where an incident exerts a traumatic effect on an individual, then it should be recognised as such and should trigger some support mechanism. It is necessary for the Comhairle to develop a post-trauma support programme which should include:

- careful selection and training of staff who are to work in potentially dangerous or aggressive environments
- well-designed emergency procedures and action plans
- an education programme detailing potential hazards
- dedicated on-scene support
- professional back-up following the incident – aimed at providing short and long term psychological support, as needed.

SUMMARY OF ACTION PLAN

10.1

ACTION	DATE
Approval of Stress Prevention Policy	October 2004
Training Programme in place	December 2004
Re-negotiate Job Description of relevant management postholders	December 2004
Develop a programme to identify the hazards and taking action including development of risk assessments	May 2005
Developing a programme for caring for employees with work-related stress	May 2005
Reporting of risk assessments to Departmental Safety Committees and programme of reviews set	December 2005
Departmental Safety Committees to consider carrying out Stress Audits	December 2005
Development of plan for coping with the aftermath of a critical incident	December 2005