

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD

18th March 2008

Staff Work Related Stress Survey Results

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor Roger Smith – Portfolio Holder for Human Resources and Legal and Democratic Services
Responsible Head of Service	Jo Pitman - Head of HR&OD

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to convey the results of the work related stress audit to PMB which was carried out as part of the risk assessment process and strategic framework to identify areas of potential risk, and, if proven, to take appropriate action.

The framework was designed to both support other interventions in relation to reduction of sickness absence, and also respond to the Health and Safety Executives (HSE) suggestion that we should undertake action to identify whether the Council had a problem with work related stress.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1.1 It is recommended that PMB:

2.2 Note the content of the survey recommendations and action plans.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the Chancellors review of Long Term Sickness and absence in the Public Sector, and the Health and Safety Commissions (HSC) “Revitalising Health and Safety” targets, the Council met with the HSE to pledge its commitment to ill Health Management, along with minimising health and safety risks, which have been identified as one of the key ways of improving effectiveness and efficiency.

To bring about the necessary reduction in sickness absence, evidence suggests that major gains can be made by addressing key underlying work related causes in addition to some of the other strategic interventions that are currently being (or have been) addressed by the Council. One of the major areas of interest to the HSE associated with such key underlying work related causes was, unsurprisingly, the subject of work related stress.

What is Stress?

The HSE defines stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them”.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

Why Does Stress Have to Be Tackled ?

About 1 in 5 people say that they find work either very, or extremely, stressful, and over half a million people report experiencing work related stress at a level they believe has actually made them ill. Each case of stress leads to an average of 29 days lost.

What Did The Council Do

Under Health and Safety law, employers have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that their workplaces are safe and healthy. Ill health resulting from stress caused at work has to be treated the same way as ill health due to other physical causes present in the workplaces.

Following discussions with the HSE about how the Council might move forward positively in its approach to identifying (and addressing) work related stress, the HSE recommended undertaking an employee Stress Audit as part of the risk assessment process, and to also create an organisational culture that is aware of the causes of stress, and to take action to avoid them.

The HSE also indicated that it would like to see evidence of positive action towards the management of employee stress by April 2009. Plans were therefore put in place to ensure that we demonstrated such positive action through a Stress Audit Programme comprising the following elements:

- September 2007 Forming a Steering Group
- September 2007 Promoting the work related stress programme
- October 2007 Conducting an employee stress survey
- November 2007 Analysing the findings of the survey
- November 2007 Introducing focus groups
- December 2007 Presentation/Report to CMT
- December 2007 Feed resource implications into budget preparation process for 2008/9

- February 2008 Develop action plans at both corporate and individual service level

- June 2008 Quarterly progress update to CMT
- September 2008 “ “ “ “
- December 2008 “ “ “ “
- March 2009 “ “ “ “

External partner

In order to provide a guarantee of anonymity, objectivity and expertise for the stress survey, an external partner was engaged to facilitate this process.

Work Related Stress Survey Results

The survey questionnaire related to six prime stressors identified by the HSE "Management Standards" on Work Related Stress. The questionnaire was completed by 62% of Council employees and was analysed by the external partner who produced a final report which contained the recommendations for the corporate action plan, and the key themes arising from them. These recommendations do, in part, form the basis of the individual service action plans which all heads of service have discussed with the external partner. These action plans will start to be implemented in 2008/9.

Summary of Findings

The findings from the questionnaire benchmarked the perceived stress levels in each category against the HSE's target standards as follows.

- 75% of employees said they were coping with the demands of the day to day work **(HSE Target 85%)**
- 78% of employees said they were happy with the nature of the work **(HSE Target 85%)**
- 76% of employees said they were happy with the support they receive at work **(HSE Target 85%)**
- 75% of employees said they were happy with the way their colleagues behave **(HSE Target 65%)**
- 74% of employees said they were happy with their roles and responsibilities at work **(HSE Target 65%)**
- 67% of employees said they could cope when change happens at work **(HSE Target 65%)**

The Council exceeded the HSE Targets in 3 of 6 stressor areas, and while we did not quite hit the target in the other 3, we were very close, and now have a base from which we can aim to improve.

These findings were validated by the focus groups attended by both managers and staff in separate groups.

What Staff Told Us

There is a wide range of experiences depending where individuals work within the council. Most said they were not stressed by their employment at the Council, although there is still room for improvement.

Recommendations for the Corporate Action Plan

- Consider at corporate level the stress levels stressors and agree appropriate priorities and action at strategic level.

- Identify the actions to take within each service in order to effect improvement e.g. to inform, communicate, train and coach
- Cascade those recommendations for action by individual managers.
- Identify training and development needs, also taking into account the results from the staff survey, actions already underway for Investors in People and individual PDR's. These should be considered by Service and nature of job
- Publish a summary of findings for distribution to staff.
- A further audit to benchmark progress to be undertaken within an agreed timeframe such as 12 – 18 months
- Create action plans identifying that which will be done with clear dates for implementation.

The Key Areas from the Detailed Recommendations

The key themes from the recommendations in the final report were to:

- Ensure that policies, procedures and systems to support staff are more effectively communicated and understood
- Reinforce the message to staff so that they are able to seek support from line managers and by using the systems in place
- Emphasise the use of the PDR process to give feedback to discuss training and development needs, give support and to actively deal with any issues of concern
- Address the issue of public and customer behaviour and where this cannot be changed, ensure that training has been given, that the demands of the job are not excessive and that appropriate escalation procedures are in place
- Continue to improve the management of change
- Consider mounting some health awareness campaigns to promote healthy lifestyles

Conclusions

The purpose of the audit was threefold –

- To identify issues and behaviours that are to be further supported and reinforced
- To identify those issues and behaviours which need to be improved
- To conduct a formal stress risk assessment

All of these purposes have been served.

Overall the results are credible when benchmarked against the HSE target scores, with no major problems identified. However, the journey is not yet at an end, managers are now in a position to –

- Determine priorities and to take action bases upon relevant and up to date information

- Monitor and assess progress towards improvement where they deem this to be necessary.

When the action plans have been completed, a further assessment to benchmark progress in a period such as 12 – 18 months should be carried out.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The survey itself was funded from the Corporate Organisational Development budget.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None directly arising from this report, but failure to manage known work related stress/stressors can lead to employment tribunal claims associated with breaches of health and safety legislation, and/or constructive dismissal.

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 This will help address the Councils priority of improvement in corporate governance.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 It has been established from the survey that there are no major risks. The risks associated with this report have been identified in the survey itself and contained in the report. Now that the survey has been completed, action plans have been produced from the recommendations submitted in a report to CMT. However, it is also reasonable to say that now the survey is completed, CMT must demonstrate that it is committed to taking the action to address the specific issues that have emerged from the report if we are to maintain the confidence of our staff and ensure a safe and healthy environment. Once health and safety risks are identified it is particularly important that the Council is able to demonstrate that appropriate managerial remedial action is being taken.

8. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Now that we have established that there are no major problems with work related stress within the organisation, we will be able to concentrate on implementing appropriate remedial action to the areas that have been highlighted in the survey. This in turn will help contribute to a reduction in sickness absence levels which will ultimately enhance our productivity rate and improve customer service.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None arising directly from this report.

10. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None arising directly from this report.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues – None
Personnel Implications – As identified in the report
Governance/Performance Management – As identified in the report
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – None
Policy – None
Environmental - None

12. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director (Partnerships and Projects)	Yes
Executive Director (Services)	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services)	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR)	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	Yes

13. WARDS AFFECTED

All

14. APPENDICES

None

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- The monthly sickness absence statistics
- Final report on the 2007 Stress Survey

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