

ANGUS COUNCIL
PERSONNEL & PROPERTY SERVICES COMMITTEE
1 MAY 2001
MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK
REPORT BY ACTING DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

ABSTRACT

This report advises of progress in implementing the Action Plan designed to support implementation of the Council's Management of Stress at Work Policy.

1. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee note and approve the terms of this report.

2. INTRODUCTION

Reference is made to the meeting of the Personnel and Property Services Committee on 1 February 2000 which, following consideration of Report No 125/2000 by the Director of Personnel, approved a Management of Stress at Work Policy for Angus Council.

In approving the Policy the Committee noted that it was essential to have an Action Plan designed to support implementation of the Council's Policy.

A general Action Plan was incorporated within Report No 125/2000, and following approval of the Policy by Committee a more detailed Plan was prepared in consultation with the Trade Unions.

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the content of that Action Plan and progress to date in implementing the Plan.

3. ACTION PLAN: PROGRESS

For ease of reference each specific item in the Action Plan is in italics and is followed by a narrative outlining progress.

Hold Stress at Work Workshop for Chief Officers

A Workshop aimed at raising awareness of stress as an issue and introducing the Council's Policy was held for all Chief Officers in May 2000.

Insert article in Angus Matters introducing Policy

An article advising employees that the Policy had been adopted by the Council was included in the June 2000 edition of Angus Matters which was distributed to every employee.

Issue copy of Policy to all employees

A copy of the Policy, in leaflet format, was issued with the June 2000 edition of Angus Matters. This leaflet has been subsequently issued to, and will continue to be issued to, any new employee who joins the Council.

Consider content of current Personal Stress Awareness Course and redesign if appropriate

The Personal Stress Awareness Course pre dates the Management of Stress at Work Policy.

The objective of this course is for employees to:

- become aware of the causes and effects of stress
- understand the reasons for individual differences
- explore personal responsibility in the management of stress and their own coping skills
- learn a range of new coping skills appropriate to their own needs
- develop a personal profile which facilitates the design of their own stress management plans

It is a traditionally well supported course and its objectives support and complement the Policy.

This is, however, only one of a number of personal development courses, attendance at which can give an employee the means to cope with and manage potential causes of stress. Other such courses include:

- Assertiveness - at which the employee learns personal skills for building confidence and improving interpersonal communications
- Managing Time - at which the employee learns of some practical steps for making the most effective use of their working day
- Personal and Career Development Programme - this course, which is for women below grade AP3, is designed to support participants in goal setting, communication, self presentation and career development

Consider means by which awareness of Personal Stress Awareness Course can be raised amongst employees

In an effort to raise awareness of the Personal Stress Awareness Course, and the other courses referred to above, this year every employee received with their September payslip a leaflet containing the course programme for next year and future editions of Angus Matters will also include a list of forthcoming courses. Managers have also received a more comprehensive training programme schedule which gives more detail on content and objectives of the courses.

It is not suggested that attendance at any of these courses should be compulsory. It is envisaged that the need to address areas covered by any of these courses should arise during performance appraisal and development sessions between manager and employee. If any area covered by any of the courses is identified as a need during such sessions, then attendance at the course should enable that need to be addressed.

Source and organise training for line managers on stress/the Policy/risk assessments

It is crucial that all managers are aware of:

- the legal, financial, performance and health implications of stress at work
- the causes and effects of stress and individual differences
- how to recognise stress in others and how to deal with it
- how to conduct simple risk assessments for stress in their own areas
- the practical and realistic tools and techniques of managing stress at work

There are external training providers who deliver courses which meet these objectives.

The Chief Officers' Management Team has supported a proposal that such a course should be provided for all those with responsibility for people - around 600 managers - and that attendance should be compulsory.

Preliminary investigations indicate that such a course, for 12 persons, would cost approximately £1,000 leading to a total cost of £50,000. It is hoped that this cost would reduce through a formal tendering exercise which is currently ongoing.

Given the numbers involved it is considered that all 600 managers could be covered over a planned five year programme starting in the 2001/2002 financial year. On this basis it is

anticipated that the cost would be around £10,000 per annum over the next five years, to be met from the corporate training budget.

While this represents a significant proportion of the corporate training budget, it is an essential step for any organisation in tackling stress to ensure that their managers are trained to manage stress in the workplace just as they are trained to manage other aspects of the business.

Produce booklet on Stress at Work

The production of an in-house booklet covering causes, indicators, management of stress etc would complement the above training. However, it may be that the course materials provided by the external training provider would be of sufficient quality to negate the need for such a booklet.

Consider courses for line managers covering core management skills

This action point takes a wider look at what the Council needs to do to ensure that managers are more generally equipped to manage stress in the workplace.

As the Health & Safety Executive has stated ordinary plain good management and regard for people is as effective a way as any of dealing with stress.

Performance appraisal and development sessions for employees with responsibility for managing others concentrate on five core management skills - leadership, organising the work of others, motivation of subordinates, development of subordinates and skill in promoting change.

Many of the factors which are critical to the ability of the manager to manage stress at work are identified within the Management of Stress at Work Policy and these basically expand upon and complement these core management skills.

The Chief Officers' Management Team has therefore agreed to use the factors within the Policy during performance appraisal and development sessions to support and complement discussion between appraiser and appraisee when considering these core management skills.

This will enable both the appraiser and appraisee to consider the appraisee's development needs against more detailed criteria than, as at present, the five broad headings.

Any development need would be included in the appraisee's development plan. While there may be various ways in which the identified need could be addressed it may be appropriate to arrange attendance at one of the courses run by the Personnel Department which cover these core management skills.

There is a range of such courses run by the Department including: Influencing and Negotiating Skills; Running Meetings; Managing People; Managing Projects; Recruitment & Selection; Absence Management; Handling Disciplinary Matters and Managing Poor Performance; and Assertiveness.

Whether the need is addressed by attendance at a course or by some other means, the ultimate outcome of this proposed approach should be that we satisfy ourselves that our managers possess the core management skills to help identify, remove and manage those potential sources of stress at work which they can directly influence.

Liaise with Scotland's Health at Work Co-ordinating Group to consider how best to promote employee health and welfare issues

Council departments have been successful in attaining various levels of Scotland's Health at Work Awards and the Chief Officers' Management Team has recently reaffirmed their continuing commitment to the attainment and maintenance of these Awards. Discussions with the Chair of the Co-ordinating Group have confirmed that many of the planned future activities will address various aspects of stress including the various techniques which an individual can adopt to alleviate stressors.

Report on provision of counselling facilities for employees

In approving the Policy in February 2000, the Committee requested a further report on employee counselling, such report also to consider the feasibility of a full counselling service being provided by an external provider in what is commonly referred to as an Employee Assistance Programme.

Employee counselling is the most frequently used tool to manage stress. It is a service provided by an employer to enable employees to obtain counselling and advice on matters which affect them.

Employee counselling can be restricted to counselling on matters within the workplace or it can be extended to include matters outwith the workplace. As the Council's Policy recognises that stress at work can derive from either work or non-related work matters, the Committee agreed that any counselling provision for employees should cover both aspects.

A typical employee counselling service would include counselling in work problems, family problems, financial or legal problems, emotional stress and misuse of drugs or alcohol.

An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is defined as a work site focused programme to assist in the identification and resolution of employee concerns which affect or may affect performance. More specifically it provides information, advice and counselling services direct to employees.

An EAP offers the following benefits to an organisation:

- successful schemes reduce absenteeism, staff turnover and accidents
- counsellors can act as impartial quality control - recommending changes to reduce employee stress
- managers can refer people whose problems are beyond their own counselling skills and managerial scope
- employees can still go to their managers for most work-related difficulties but have an impartial, confidential source of support to help cope with their problems
- helps fulfil statutory obligations and common law duty of care for employees physical, psychological and social wellbeing

EAPs can be provided 'in-house' or by an external provider.

Most employers offering EAPs now choose external providers. The main reasons for not providing an 'in-house' service are it is not seen to be separate from the organisation, employees do not feel confident about the confidentiality of approaching an 'in-house' provider and the lack of specialist skills available 'in-house'. As highlighted to Committee when adopting the Stress at Work Policy, this latter point is of particular relevance to the Council as this specialist skills are not available to provide an adequate 'in-house' service and indeed the cost of recruiting such staff would be prohibitive. This is not therefore considered to be a viable option.

An external EAP provider can provide a full range of services from a basic helpline advice service restricted to the employee to a 24 hour all year access helpline advice service supplemented by face to face counselling services which are also available to the employee's immediate partner.

The cost of such a service is obviously determined by the range of services provided but indicative costs which range from £24,000 per annum to £90,000 for a fully comprehensive service would support the view that more detailed consideration needs to be given to this issue before making such a significant financial commitment.

Such a view was expressed by the Chief Officers' Management Team which whilst supportive in principle of a counselling service provided by an external provider was of the view that a service introduced on a pilot basis for a period of one year may be the most appropriate means of taking this matter forward.

The Council has approved through the Policy Led Budgeting process the allocation of £10000 to fund such a pilot in the 2001/2002 financial year and it is now proposed to invite, by tender,

employee counselling service providers to submit proposals for the provision of a counselling service on a pilot basis.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

Any costs associated with initiatives outlined in Section 3 of this report have been/will be contained within existing budgetary provision.

5. HUMAN RESOURCE ACT IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Rights implications arising as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

6. CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Director of Law & Administration have been consulted on the terms of this report.

HUGH ROBERTSON
Acting Director of Personnel

NOTE No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.