Meeting:	Employees' Consultative Forum
Date:	5 July 2005
Subject:	Stress at Work Project
Responsible Officer:	Executive Director (Business Connections)
Contact Officer:	Brenda Goring, Justin Tyas, Health and Safety Services
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder For Communications, Partnership & Human Resources
Key Decision:	No

Section 1: Summary

Work-related stress is a significant cause of occupational ill health. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE, 2001) defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed upon them."

The report also describes an ongoing stress evaluation project being coordinated by Health and Safety Services to identify work place stressors affecting the council's employees and recommendations on actions to address them.

Decision Required

> TO endorse the report and support the action being taken.

Reason for report

> To inform the Forum of action being taken by Health and safety Services to address the issue of stress at work. Harrow council is undergoing considerable change e.g. the Middle Management Review (MMR) and has recently been reorganised, and is refocusing its activities through the new harrow project. Organisational change can be a major determinant of stress.

Benefits

> Overall improved organisational health and resilience as well as improvements in work relationships and performance. Benefits would also include savings on the cost of below par productivity and sickness absence.

Risks

> The impact could be increased accidents and ill health reports with sickness absence, falls in productivity, worsening industrial relations and employee relationships generally. Ultimately, apart from damage to employee wellbeing and negative impact on their families and communities, there is too the risk of civil claims and HSE enforcement action.

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History

Work related stress is the single biggest cause of occupational ill health absence. In 2000, the HSE made stress one of its priority programs. The best scientific evidence suggests that work-related stress is best tackled through an organisational approach that promotes good working practices.

Stress Evaluation Project

2.2.1 Introduction

An external consultant (Praesto Consulting) was engaged on a stress evaluation project for the council. Health and Safety Services were assigned to coordinate the project. In the first phase of the project, a generic 'sources of stress' questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was distributed as widely as possible across the council including schools. Throughout the initial stages of the project UNISON were fully consulted. For example, at UNISON's request the closing date for return of questionnaires was extended and designated response boxes were provided at the Central Depot to facilitate return of questionnaires. A representative from UNISON was present when the consultant interviewed the council's Occupational Health Provider.

2.2.2 Project aims
1. To identify work-place stressors affecting the council's employees across its activities (linked to the HSE's Management Standards)
2. To identify who is affected (particular groups), and identify extent of risk
3. To evaluate risks (caused by stressors), by gathering information from surveys, running focus groups, etc.
4. To develop an action plan to address above

2.2.3 The measure of success would include improvements in the standard of management (specifically areas as defined in HSE Management Standards) and a reduction in occupational ill health and absenteeism.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 The *sources of stress* questionnaire was sent to all GroupWise e-mail accounts, hard copies were dispatched through external post bags, and at the request of UNISON several drop boxes were provided at the Central Depot for Contract Services staff. The consultant provided the questionnaire. A unique coding

system was included to enable responses to be tracked to their sub directorate grouping.

2.3.2 Nearly one thousand responses were received by the closing date (24th January 2005). Each questionnaire was transcribed onto an Excel spreadsheet. Data analysis employed a technique used by the consultant. A series of six *indicators* were developed similar to a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI). A 'satisfaction' type rating (expressed as a percentage) was produced for each of the six statements (one for each of the stress Management Standards[1]) on the questionnaire. A Likert type scaling (from 1 to 4) was employed for each statement, with the 'satisfaction' expressed as the percentage of respondents who often or sometimes agree with the statement. A percentage indicator below 75% is (arbitrarily) set as an indication of concern. In this analysis there is no external benchmark to compare results against.

2.4 Results

2.4.1 The main results from the questionnaire are summarised below:
(Note: all values in parenthesis are expressed as percentages)

1. The total number of questionnaires received by the closing date and transcribed onto the spreadsheet for analysis was 995.
2. Overall response rates across the council were: Business Connections (10.2); Chief Executive (2.0); OD (2.9); PF (61.7); UL (15.8) and Other/don't' know (7.4). This information is presented graphically in Appendix 2: Chart 1.
3. When the *Indicators* were employed, *Relationships* (74) and *Change* (61) are the two key stressors suggesting concern for the whole organisation. This information is presented graphically in Appendix 2: Chart 2.
4. Where a sufficient sample size allowed, analysis employing the (HSE Stress Management Standard) indicators was also used. Table 1 shows the areas of concern across the councils using the Management Standards indicators.
(Note: only areas where the indicators suggest concern are shown below)

Table 1: Table to show areas of concern suggested Management Standard Indicators

Area	Management Standard Indicator, (%)	Sample size, (n)
Business Connections: Business Services	Control (52)	67
	Support (64)	67
	Change (25)	67
Business Connections: Finance & Business Strategy	Relationships (68)	25
	Change (68)	25
Organisational Development:	Support (72)	29

---

[1] The HSE's six key stress Management Standards are Demands, Control, Support, Relationships, Role and Change. The Standard address 6 key areas of work and design that if poorly managed can contribute to ill health, absence and staff turnover.

Organisational Performance AND HR/Organisational Effectiveness		
People First: Children's Services	Relationships (69)	153
	Change (60)	144
People First: Community Care	Relationships (72)	116
	Change (68)	111
People First: Learning and Community Development	Change (64)	232
People First: Strategy	Change (51)	35
Urban Living: Professional Services	Change (66)	61
Urban Living: Contract Services	Control (73)	56
	Change (57)	54

Conclusions

2.5 The main conclusions are summarised below:

1. The highest response rate received was for the People First Directorate and the lowest for Chief Executives.
2. A significant percentage (7.4) of respondents' either did not know of failed to classify themselves under the Directorate structure.
3. For the (whole) organisation the areas of most concern for the council are within the Relationships[2] and Change[3] Standards.
4. At the sub Directorate level the most significant group identified was the Business Connections group Business Services, which had some of the lowest Management Standard indicator scores.

2.6 Discussion

2.6.1 The questionnaire did not provide space for free responses, however some respondents' added additional comments. Several respondents' indicated that they felt the questionnaire did not examine all sources of stress and that the questions were not sufficient

2.6.2 An important communication issues with the project is the explanation of what the stress Management Standards mean and how they are applied. They do not tackle stress at an individual level.

2.6.3 Other sources of stress indicated by respondents' who chose to add comments can be generally classified into ergonomic/environmental factors. For example, some respondents' perceive poor standards of accommodation as a significant source of stress.

---

[2] Relationships – positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
[3] Change – how organisational change is managed and communicated.

2.6.4 The questionnaire was distributed as widely as possible across the councils' employees, including schools. Analysis of this sub group (Learning & Community Development) failed to resolve any specific issues in terms of the stress management standards. This is probably due to the appropriateness of questionnaire for schools; some felt that sources of stress for teachers relate to external performance targets and expectations.

2.6.5 Following discussions with the council's Occupational Health provider, it is noted that teachers are seen as highly significant group in terms of their level of reported stress. There is a Well-Being Project in Harrow schools. There are apparently 27 Harrow schools and 1 LEA unit participating in this national Well-Being program.

2.6.6 Several criticisms could be levelled against the consultants' questionnaire. Firstly, that is that it is too simplistic; with just six statements based around the Management Standards. Secondly, the questionnaire is technically flawed, based on a 'filter' principle that the HSE have now abandoned. However, putting the criticisms to one side, the questionnaire has provided some useful 'baseline' data about the sources of stress across the council.

2.7 **Harrow Councils Stress Policy**
2.7.1 Consultants comments on the stress policy
The consultant was asked to comment upon the council's policy[4] relating to the management of stress and mental health amongst employees within Harrow.

2.7.2 The consultant has stated that the policy places emphasis on the burden of stress and mental illness upon the employee. This reduces the burden of stress liability upon Harrow as an employer. However the consultant strongly recommended reviewing this policy in light of the HSE guidelines to improve good practice and standards in Harrow.

2.7.3 An example of a model stress policy (from the HSE) is provided in Appendix 3.

2.8.0 HSE Health & Safety Management Inspection
2.8.1 Health & safety inspection theme: stress
The HSE visited Harrow in early 2005 (Jan 31 – Feb 11) to conduct a health and safety management inspection. The inspection drew upon the model laid down in the HSE's HSG65[5] and looked areas thematically, including stress.

2.8.2 Following post inspection feedback, developing work on stress policy was noted as a 'strength'. However, detailed feedback from the inspection audit[6] indicated

---

[4] Policy Statement and Code of Practice on Stress at Work and Well Being (2002), Health Safety and Welfare Applicable to all employees, Organisational Development, Harrow.
[5] Successful health and safety management HSG65, HSE (2003). The HSEs model is based upon 6 key elements of 'successful' health and safety management: Policy, organising, planning & implementing, measuring performance, reviewing performance and auditing.

several areas of weakness. For example, in reviewing Harrow's policy, the lead inspector noted that "The format is more of guidance than policy. The HSE "example policy" could be better used." (ibid: Appendix 3:1).

2.8.3 The HSE will be undertaking a follow up inspection of Harrow in early 2006. In response to the inspection, an Action Plan has been developed to capture both the strengths and weaknesses identified in the health and safety management systems. Included within the action plan is the objective to "Continue to develop work on stress including local policies."
(Health & Safety Management Post Inspection – Action Plan (2005):1).

2.9   HSE Indicator Tool for Work Related Stress
2.9.1 Harrow Libraries Questionnaire (Indicator Tool)
The HSE has a toolkit to help employees and employers work together to prevent excessive work-related stress. The toolkit consists of a questionnaire and a continuous improvement model, which enables organisations to compare themselves with others.

2.9.2 A proposal to pilot the questionnaire was made to Harrow libraries management. This was accepted, and the questionnaire was distributed to all library staff. Completed questionnaires are currently being analysed, and the results will be used as a benchmark, with stress improvement targets set.

2.10   Stress Management Training
2.10.1 Assessing Stress Risk Course
To support the council's action on stress at work Health and Safety Services have offered an *Assessing Stress Risk* course to managers. The course gives managers the underpinning knowledge about the causes and presentation of work related stress and action to address these[7]. Six Assessing Stress Risk courses have been run to date, and in excess of one hundred managers have undertaken the training.

2.11 Further Work on Stress Policy and Development
2.11.1 Further work on work-related stress should be taken (linked to the Action Plan) to ideally, prevent or adequately control stressors affecting council employees. Softer options that do not attempt to tackle the root causes need to be rejected. By implication the council's stress policy will need to be re-written. Specific and measurable improvement in the (key) Management Standards should be targeted, along with a general reduction in occupational ill health and absenteeism.

---

[6] Audit Findings: Health & Safety Management Inspection: Work Related Stress – LB Harrow Jan 31 – Feb 11 2005.
[7] The course is designed to enable managers to develop and practice the skills necessary to recognise and assess the risk of stress for staff in their areas of responsibility, and to ensure that managers are fully aware of the legal framework for prevention and management of stress at work.

2.12   Financial Implications
       There are no direct financial costs arising from this report. Any costs that may
       arise would have to be contained with approved cash limit budgets.

2.13   Legal Implications
       The employers duty of care to his employees extends to the employees
       psychiatric well-being.

       Case law in 2002 commented that if an employer provides a confidential advice
       service, with referral to appropriate counselling or treatment services, it is unlikely
       that they will be found to be in breach of that duty.

       The authority in its action plan and review of the Council's stress policy will
       incorporate the guidance recently launched by the Health and Safety Executive.

2.14   Equalities Impact
       The inspectors highlighted weakness in the council's current arrangements for
       consultation on health and safety matters. They noted that the arrangements do
       not meet the needs of employees not covered by the currently recognised unions
       or indeed others who are not in any union. That has implications for most staff in
       the council, but in particular Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

       Action to address this issue is included in the HSE post inspection action plan
       follow –up measures which appear elsewhere on this agenda.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Successful health and safety management HSG65, HSE (2003 Edition).

HSE Audit presentation and feedback letter: Health & Safety Management Inspection:
Work Related Stress – LB Harrow Jan 31 – Feb 11 2005.

Stress Risk Assessment for Managers: Health and Safety Services Course, Harrow
Council London

HSE Management Standards and model stress policy: HSE
Website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress

Policy Statement and Code of Practice on Stress at Work and Well Being (2002), Health
Safety and Welfare Applicable to all employees: Organisational Development Harrow.

Occupational Health Statistics 2004/05

Appendix1: Stress Questionnaire 2005

(Harrow COUNCIL LONDON)

Stress at Work

Dear Colleague,

The council is conducting a stress evaluation project in order to identify workplace stressors affecting employees. The outcome of the project will be an Action Plan for developing the council's stress policy in line with best practice, and a programme for promoting well being and reducing occupational ill-health.

Please take a few moments to complete the attached survey – **information will be collected in the strictest confidence: no individuals or small groups will be identified**. You will only be asked to identify your Directorate and your larger departmental grouping

The survey form is being distributed as widely as possible to employees across the council. *Please print or photocopy additional copies of this form as necessary*.

Please return your completed survey **by Monday 24th January 2005** to:

Health & Safety Service
Room 205a Civic Centre
PO BOX 57
Harrow
Middx.
HA1 2XF
020 8424 1512
020 8424 1780 (fax)
Contact officer: Justin Tyas

If you are based at the Central Depot you can place your completed form in the box provided in the canteen adjacent to Unit 1.

PART A

The following question is designed only to identify which Directorate and larger departmental grouping you work in - please DO NOT identify yourself.

1. Which Directorate/Area do you work in?
(Please tick only **ONE** box below)

Business Connections	**Business Services**	
	Finance & Business Strategy	
	Other/Don't know	
Chief Executives	**Legal Services**	
	Corporate Governance	
	Strategic Planning	
	Communications	
	Other/Don't know	
Organisational Development	**Organisational Performance**	
	HR/Organisational Effectiveness	
	Other/Don't know	
People First	**Area Services**	
	Children's Services	
	Community Care	
	Learning & Community Development	
	Strategy	
	Other/Don't know	
Urban Living	**Strategy**	
	Tenant Services	
	Professional Services	
	Area / Contract Services	
	Other/Don't know	
Other/Don't know		

This survey continues over the page

PART B

The following six questions cover the areas that have been found to be the main sources of stress for people at work. Please tick the box that most accurately reflects how you feel about your job at the moment. **Please only tick ONE box for each question.**

1. I am able to cope with the demands of my job

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

2. I am able to have a say over the way I do my work

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

3. I believe that I receive adequate support and information from my colleagues and superiors

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

4. I am subjected to unacceptable behaviours (e.g. bullying) at work

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

5. I understand my role and responsibilities within the council

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

6. The council engages staff frequently when undertaking organisational change

Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never / Almost never

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
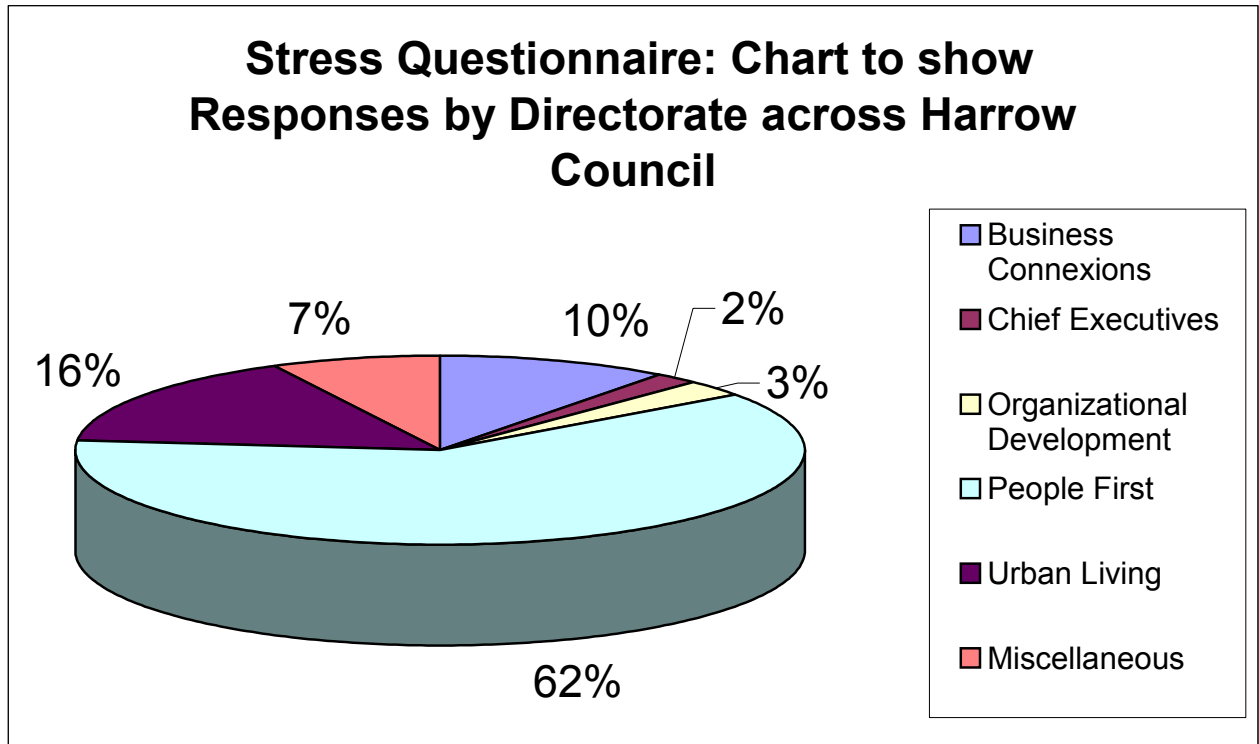
Thank you for completing the survey

Appendix 2: Charts and Graphical Enclosures

Chart 1

Stress Questionnaire: Chart to show Responses by Directorate across Harrow Council

7%   10%   2%

16%   3%

62%

- Business Connexions
- Chief Executives
- Organizational Development
- People First
- Urban Living
- Miscellaneous

Chart 2

Chart to show aggregate council indicator responses

Indicators below 75% represent areas of concern

Q1. Demands — 94
Q2. Control — 85
Q3. Support — 84
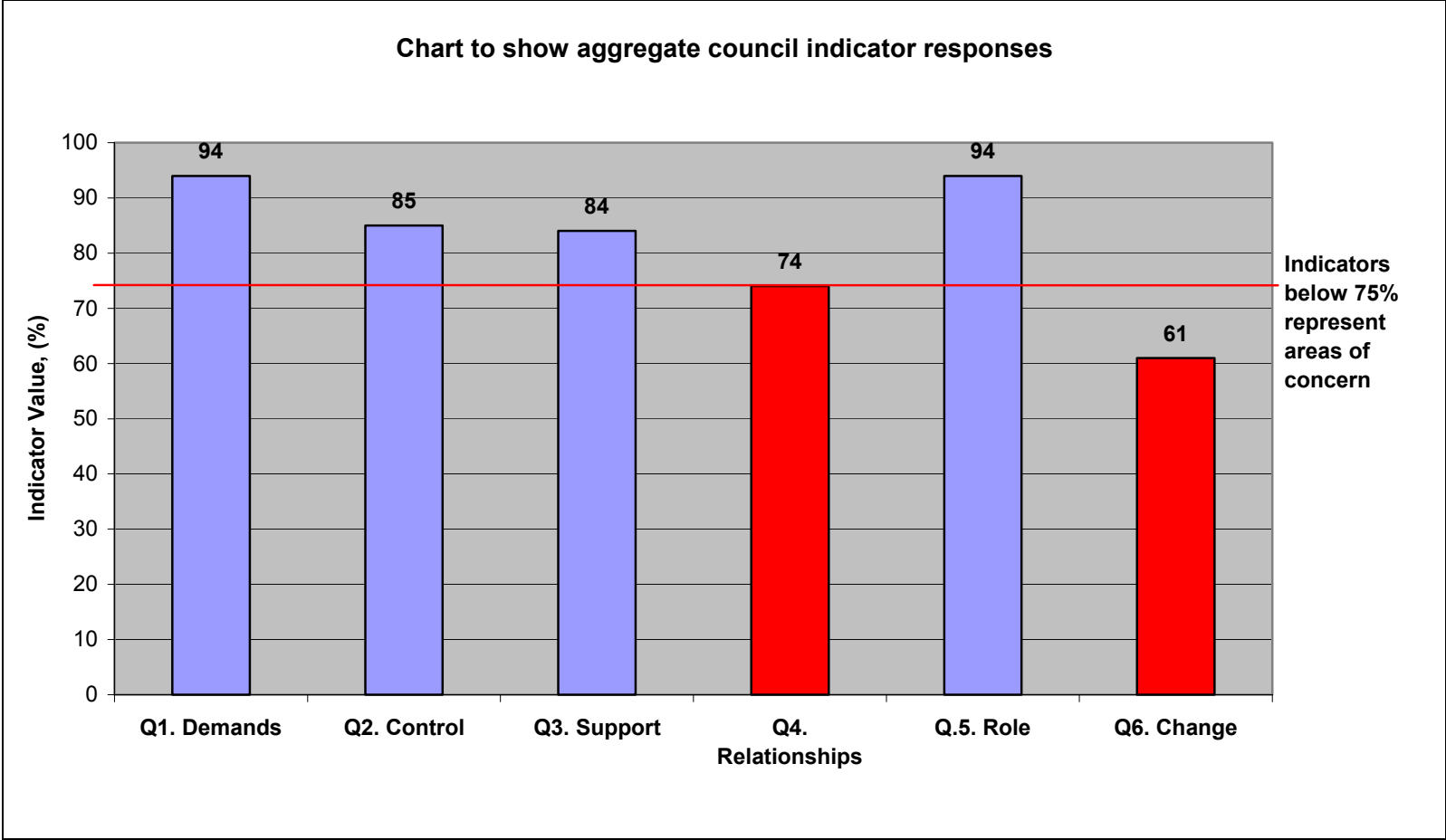Q4. Relationships — 74
Q.5. Role — 94
Q6. Change — 61

Appendix 3: AN EXAMPLE OF A STRESS POLICY

Introduction
We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our employees and recognises that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.

This policy will apply to everyone in the company and managers are responsible for implementation and the company is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

Definition of stress
The Health and Safety Executive define stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them".
This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress, which can be detrimental to health.

Policy
The company will identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
The company will consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
The company will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
The company will provide confidential counseling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
The company will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company's agreed stress management strategy.

Responsibilities
Managers
Conduct and implement recommendations of risks assessments within their jurisdiction.
Ensure good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organizational and procedural changes.
Ensure staff is fully trained to discharge their duties.
Ensure staff is provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
Monitor workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.
Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that staff is not overworking.
Monitor holidays to ensure that staff is taking their full entitlement.
Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
Be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work e.g. bereavement or separation.

Occupational Health and Safety Staff
Provide specialist advice and awareness training on stress.
Train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments.
Support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work.

Refer to workplace counselors or specialist agencies as required.

Monitor and review the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.

Inform the employer and the health and safety committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.

Human Resources

Give guidance to managers on the stress policy.

Assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address stress by collating sickness absence statistics.

Advise managers and individuals on training requirements.

Provide continuing support to managers and individuals in a changing environment and encourage referral to occupational workplace counselors where appropriate.

Employees

Raise issues of concern with your Safety Representative, line manager or occupational health.

Accept opportunities for counseling when recommended.

Function of Safety Reps

Safety Representatives must be meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design that could precipitate stress.

Safety Representatives must be able to consult with members on the issue of stress including conducting any workplace surveys.

Safety Representatives must be meaningfully involved in the risk assessment process.

Safety Representatives should allowed access to collective and anonymous data from HR.

Safety Representatives should be provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any Trade Union training relating to workplace stress.

Safety Representatives should conduct joint inspections of the workplace at least 3 months to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

Role of the Safety Committee

The joint Safety Committee will perform a pivotal role in ensuring that this policy is implemented.

The Safety Committee will oversee monitoring of the efficacy of the policy and other measures to reduce stress and promote workplace health and safety.

Signed by:
Director:
Date:
Employee Representative
Date:

Source: HSE Website: www.hse.gov.uk/stress