



## ACTION PLANS SECTION 6





## 6.0 ACTION PLANS

### 6.1 Introduction

It is essential that the work and effort put into developing policies, carrying out risk assessments, conducting focus groups, etc. results in tangible outputs, and one effective way of facilitating such is to use 'action plans'.

As well as ensuring tangible outputs i.e. improved stress management, action plans also help:

- Set goals
- Prioritise actions
- Demonstrate commitment
- Demonstrate action
- Provide benchmarks for future measurement i.e. performance indicators

An action plan should follow the SMART principles i.e. it should be:

Specific  
Measurable  
Agreed  
Realistic  
Time bound

There are different interpretations of the 'SMART' acronym, with some depicting the 'A' as meaning 'Attainable', which is fine. However, this version of SMART is deliberately used as agreement on the actions to be undertaken contributes to effective stress management all on its own!

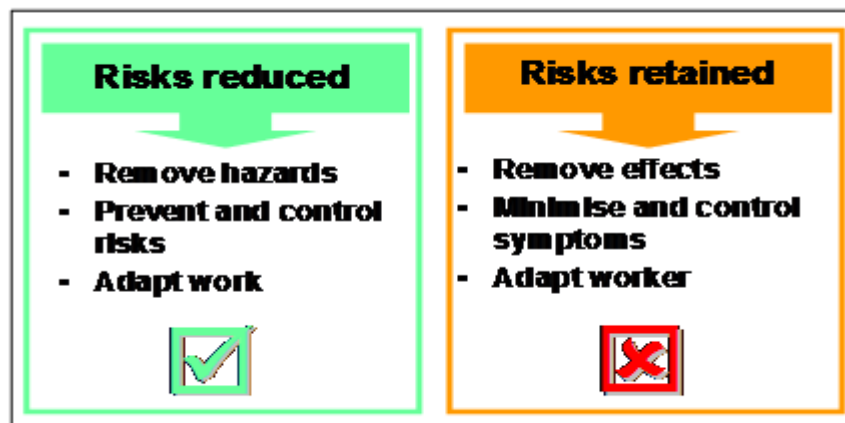


## 6.2 Types of stress interventions

There are three levels of intervention for dealing with workplace stress:

1. The first is Primary interventions. These are aimed at eliminating or modifying workplace stressors to reduce their negative impact on all individuals in the organisation. Systems and mechanisms to prevent stress arising in the first place are normally based on good management methods. These can include job redesign or work-life balance policies i.e. adapting the work.
2. Secondary interventions focus on increasing the awareness and coping skills of the individual e.g. stress management training and health promotion activities. See section 7 for practical stress management training resources.
3. Tertiary interventions are concerned with the treatment and rehabilitation of distressed individuals e.g. counselling or return to work policies.

The overall aim will be to have an effective stress prevention and management approach. When compiling action plans consideration should be given to possible actions at all levels from primary to tertiary. Invariably there will be a strong focus on interventions that control stress focus at the organisational level. The need for individual responsibility and action should not be overlooked but must not be relied on to the detriment of staff and the organisation as indicated in the diagram below.





## 6.3 Prioritising solutions in an action plan

Many companies are already doing more than they realise to tackle stress simply by managing staff well.

It is often not possible to address all issues immediately and therefore items need to be selected for prioritisation and agreed with senior management and union representatives. Issues may be prioritised because they are of a serious nature; they affect the majority of staff or affect groups most of the time. Look for hot spots to focus resources and look for areas of good performance

Solutions based on a clear understanding of a problem are going to be the most effective. It has been found that the most effective improvements have been based on consultations with staff which is part of the risk assessment. As staff have participated they are then committed to seeing the solutions put in place.

Actions which align with existing initiatives are often easier to complete. It can be the small things that make the difference – so consider all suggestions.

Some of the things to be considered when producing action plans are:

Can the organisation tackle the source of this problem?

What are the options?

How workable is this option?

What are the costs/benefits of this option?

What are the advantages of this option?

A number of examples are documented in the Appendix. Solutions can also be found in HSE's Real Solutions Real People and also in the Work Positive resource pack and various websites including [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) and [www.hseni.gov.uk](http://www.hseni.gov.uk). It is important that action plans reflect organisational needs and staff needs.

## 6.4 Documenting the action plan

There is no set format for an action plan, however Appendix A is a typical format which can be used and adapted as required. It is essential that action plans have clear objectives and completion dates and are assigned to an individual (or function) so that progress can be readily measured.

The action plan must be created and agreed with senior management, employees and their representatives. It should be shared with all employees.

It must be noted that if an organisation gathers information from risk assessments, focus groups etc. and does nothing, or compiles an 'action plan' that isn't then 'actioned', not only does this represent a waste of time, effort and resources, it achieves little, if anything, in progressing effective stress management, and potentially it actually provides evidence that could be used *against* that organisation should stress issues, claims, etc.

Appendix B and C include examples of a range of actions and Appendix D includes actions carried out by Cookstown District Council.



## 6.5 Progressing the action plan

If a steering group has been formed to progress stress management they will be ideally placed to review all the findings, to compile an action plan, prioritise actions and plan the on-the-ground implementation. If not consideration should be given to forming a small group, ensuring all relevant workplace groupings (management, employee representatives, etc.) are represented, who can take it forward. Many organisations use their health and safety committee for this work.

Where objectives are not being met and/or dates are slipping, then this must be acknowledged and remedial action identified.



## 6.6 Appendix A - Action Plan Template

Company Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date assessment carried out: \_\_\_\_\_

Assessment carried out by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of next Review: \_\_\_\_\_

Standard area	Desired state	Current state	Practical solutions	Who will take the work forward?	When?	How will staff receive feedback?	Action completed?



Action plan template – an example using one element of Demands

Demands	Desired state	Current state	Practical solutions	Who will take the work forward?	When?	How will staff receive feedback?	Action completed?
The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work	Average to good performance	Bad/very bad performance  Workloads are not planned and peaks often occur during summer when people are on annual leave	1. Plan work better and if peaks do clash with fixed annual leave commitments consider talking to other departments to see if temporary resources can be provided  Employees to talk to line managers about upcoming leave and potential difficulties with workload during monthly meetings	1. Line managers to lead and suggest the idea to senior managers.  2. All, with line manager to lead	Issue to be raised at next senior managers meeting  Immediately	1. Via monthly meetings, staff bulletins  2. During monthly meetings	Yes. [Date]  Yes – activity ongoing



## 6.7 Appendix B - Typical examples of actions (by topic)

**Demands** - includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- the organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- people's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

***Focus group suggestions:***

### **Management**

- Develop and implement a stress management policy.
- Develop and implement a workforce planning and resourcing strategy.
- Develop and inform staff of the “Lone Working” policy and review against current best practice.

### **Communication**

- Address staff turnover and vacancy management with progress regularly communicated to staff e.g. by team brief.
- Communicate reasons for lack of resources to relevant staff and where possible, realistic time scales for improvement.
- Incorporate anticipated work and challenges in monthly team brief.
- Plan workload to ensure busy periods do not clash with fixed annual leave commitments and communicate with other departments to check the availability of temporary resources.
- Discuss upcoming leave and potential workload difficulties during monthly meetings.
- Improve communication through the provision an intranet site.



## **Assessments**

- Carry out regular workload assessments and prioritise staff cover for departments which are under pressure.
- Carry out risk assessments of all work areas.
- Investigate instances of violence at work and implement measures to ensure they can be avoided in the future.

## **IT System**

- Consult with users to achieve a user friendly computer system.
- Provide computer training clinics.
- Invest in technologies and skills to increase service quality, as downtime can be expensive as well as frustrating for staff.
- Introduce a separate stand alone booking system that can operate when the servers are down.

## **Training**

- Provide time management training.
- Provide health and safety training in house for all staff in areas such as first aid at work, manual handling, COSHH, use of equipment, PPE etc.



## **Control - how much say the person has in the way they do their work.**

### ***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### ***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- the organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- employees are consulted over their work patterns.

### ***Focus group suggestions:***

#### **Decision Making**

- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making.
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work.
- Allow staff some control over the pace of their work.
- Negotiate shift-work schedule.
- Ensure as far as possible, the different work requests placed on staff are compatible and achievable.
- Don't ask staff to stay late without notice.
- Develop a policy on flexible working arrangements/Time of in lieu.
- Where feasible all staff to avail of opportunities for flexible working arrangements.
- Revise job descriptions to clarify reporting lines and level of autonomy.
- Make the same overtime opportunities available to all staff regardless of their work status (i.e. full / part time).
- Introduce a 'working from home' policy.



## **Training**

- Make training initiatives more accessible to all staff.
- Design and deliver an in-house training programme for personal / career development and follow up with annual personal development plan for each employee.
- Develop staff skills with Post Entry Training Scheme by undertaking courses leading to professional / academic health and safety related qualifications such as NEBOSH, Certificates of Professional Competence in Handling Hazardous Waste, Manual handling Instructor etc.
- Introduce NVQ Programmes.
- Provide people skills training to line managers.
- Provide assistance to study by the introduction of a loan system to encourage staff to cover the costs of study programmes, recouping the cost from the employees' salaries over a period of time.

## **Leave**

- Clarify and communicate the sickness absence policy including when a person has to leave work early due to illness.
- Clarify and communicate the special leave policy to all staff and clearly state when this leave is available.
- Expand the flexible working and TOIL arrangements across all organisational work areas.



## **Support - this includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues**

### ***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### ***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- the organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- employees receive regular and constructive feedback

### ***Focus group suggestions:***

#### **Communication**

- Develop and implement an employee engagement strategy.
- Hold regular team meetings to discuss any emerging issues or pressures.
- Include 'work-related stress/emerging pressures' as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews.
- Consult with employees on the most suitable way to access managerial support, e.g. 'open door' policies, or agreed times to discuss emerging pressures.
- Listen to staff and agree a course of action for tackling problems – it is important for staff to feel that the contribution they make at work is valued.
- Encourage staff to share concerns about work-related stress at an early stage.
- Disseminate information on other areas of support (human resources department, occupational health, trained counsellors, and charities).
- Have speakers from other departments at team briefings on a regular basis.
- Review current policies and processes for dealing with difficult staffing issues, consider if further staff training is required.
- Seek examples of how staff would like to, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the organisation?
- Support and encourage staff, even when things go wrong.



- Enhance greater openness within the organisation by sharing minutes from SMT and other meetings (e.g. by posting on the intranet).
- Foster productive and cohesive working relations by the introduction of mediation, or counselling.
- Communicate the rules regarding referrals to the occupational health doctor to all staff.

### **Training**

- Run stress management workshops.
- Provide training in dealing with conflict/complaints/follow up service.
- Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up to date and appropriate for the core functions of employees' job.
- Offer training in basic counselling skills/access to counsellors.
- Train management in mentoring skills.
- Provide training on dealing with stress related absence.
- Provide external facilitation / training on teamwork and conflict resolution.
- Implement management of attendance procedures equally and fairly throughout the organisation.
- Provide managers at all levels with refresher training in people management. For example:
  - Special/Annual/Flexi leaves including medical and dental appointments and leave at short notice
  - Bullying and harassment policy
  - The grievance process including awareness of harassment officers and their role
  - Managing attendance
  - Performance management and providing feedback
  - Importance of confidentiality and implications of failed confidentiality
  - Risk assess all lone workers to ensure that the lone worker policy is being adhered to.

### **Personal Protective Equipment**

- Implement measures whereby staff have the option to purchase better quality PPE by covering the additional cost over and above the organisations budget.



- Process requests for PPE in a timely manner and provide explanations if requests are refused.

### **Health and Well being**

- Run wellbeing / work-life balance training and initiatives.
- Develop a Health and Well-being strategy and implement a working group.
- Accommodate phased return to work following periods of sickness absence if appropriate.
- Rollout programs and awareness sessions for chest, heart and stroke monitoring, smoking cessation clinics, subsidized gym membership, healthy lifestyle promotion.
- Provision of Counselling Services.
- Provision of Occupational health doctor and nurse.
- Provision of accelerated appointments for physiotherapy, MRI Scans, Counselling services etc.
- Explore ways the organisation could provide support if a member of staff is experiencing problems outside work.
- Storage of all sickness documentation in a secure place.

### **Personal Life**

- Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments.
- Provide a suitable rest area which is spacious, airy and provides staff with an area of privacy yet encourages them to interact with others outside of their department.
- Encourage staff to take their annual leave entitlement and their meal breaks.



## **Relationships - this includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour**

### ***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### ***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- the organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- employees share information relevant to their work;
- the organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

### ***Focus group suggestions:***

#### **Communication**

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in the organisation.
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other.
- Ensure that team briefs are carried out across all departments.
- The provision of help and support by management, particularly when dealing with issues concerning members of the public.
- Provide support for staff who work in isolation.
- Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers.
- Run cross departmental team building initiatives.
- Appoint a mediator to liaise between staff on the ground and their management to try to resolve conflicting issues.
- Remind managers of the need to address staffing issues in a private manner and that feedback should always be constructive.
- Provide management with training to assist with communication and team building.



## **Bullying and Harassment**

- Emphasise the importance of dignity at work to all staff through dignity at work training and a formally issued management statement emphasising the requirement for dignity at work and a reminder to staff that bullying is defined by effect and not intention.
- Agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure people are aware of these.
- Issue an 'Expression of Interest' circular to all staff requesting volunteers to act as 'Bullying or Harassment' officers.
- Appoint harassment officers and communicate their names to staff informing them of the role of a harassment officer.
- Implement a code of conduct and a protocol for relations between board members and staff.
- Don't tolerate any bullying behaviour or harassment.
- Ensure that any mediation or subsequent grievance procedures are processed in a timely manner along official guidelines. Keep staff informed of progress at all times including any reasons for delays in the process.



**Role** - whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles

***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- the organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- the organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities

***Focus group suggestions:***

#### **Management**

- Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the business and the customer.
- Achieve Investors in People (IIP) accreditation.

#### **Communication**

- Implement a Personal Performance Appraisal system to clarify an individual's role and the standards required for their job.
- Revise and provide clear job descriptions to clarify reporting lines and level of autonomy.
- Give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation.
- Provide staff with a clear job description.
- Define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why.
- Publish a staff directory / organisational chart to improve communications and awareness of roles.
- Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan).
- Ensure staff are aware and accept changes to the scope of their job or responsibilities (e.g. at promotion).



- Introduce a performance or appraisal system for all staff.
- Arrange short briefing sessions to provide understanding of staff roles.
- Improve communication amongst the chain of command (SMT/Managers/Staff), and between departments (e.g. consider having regular staff/team/department meetings including cross departmental meetings to develop solutions to shared problems). Greater use of intranet, notice boards etc.

### **Training**

- Allow individual departments to management their own training budget.
- Provide staff with opportunities to move to similar roles in other parts of the organisation for self development.

### **Documentation**

- Through staff involvement, review all risk assessments and safe systems of work to clarify processes and determine responsibilities.
- Review job descriptions to standardise expectations and practices.



## **Change - how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation**

### ***The Standard is that:***

- employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

### ***What should be happening/states to be achieved:***

- the organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- the organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- employees are aware of timetables for changes; and
- employees have access to relevant support during changes.

### ***Focus group suggestions:***

#### **Communication**

- Involve staff in any policy changes.
- Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element in the management of change programme.
- Define and explain the key steps of the change.
- Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly to avoid the spread of rumours.
- Make staff aware of why change is happening including the positive benefits of changing and the negative consequences of not changing.
- Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change.
- Hold regular staff meetings at a local level to alert staff of imminent changes, allow discussion of issues relevant to staff, and provide them with an opportunity to shape decision making.
- Consult with staff in a timely and candid manner.
- Implement working groups to promote awareness, understanding and compliance.
- Discuss what the change will mean in terms of day-to-day activity including are any new training needs.



- Agree methods of communication (e.g. meetings, notice boards, letters, e-mail, feedback forums etc) and frequency (e.g. weekly, monthly).
- Provide e-mail addresses and computer access for remotely located / peripatetic workers.
- Communicate details of expected changes and determine how best to communicate these to staff in all locations.

### **Review**

- Review work plans after change to ensure objectives are clear.
- Review policies to ensure they are current and in line with organisational changes. Where policies are significantly changed, reissue to staff and explain the changes.
- Ensure adequate training is provided to help employees competently perform within the changed environment.
- Introduce feedback sheets following change.



## **6.8 Appendix C - Examples of actions from HSE guidance HSG218**

HSG 218 'Managing the causes of work related stress' provides a wide range of primary interventions and practical solutions to addressing issues identified during the risk assessment process relating to demands, control, support, relationships, role and change which can be considered by management at the action planning stage. This document is free to download from the HSE website.



## **Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Demands**

### ***Possible solutions***

#### ***Workload***

- Develop personal work plans to ensure staff know what their job involves.
- Hold weekly team meetings to discuss the anticipated workload for the forthcoming week (and to deal with any planned absences).
- Hold monthly meetings with individuals to discuss their workload and any anticipated challenges.
- Adjust work patterns to cope with peaks and staff absences (this needs to be fair and agreed with employees).
- Ensure sufficient resources are available for staff to be able to do their jobs (time, equipment etc).
- Provide training (formal or informal) to help staff prioritise, or information on how they can seek help if they have conflicting priorities.

#### ***Competency***

- Devise a system to keep training records up to date to ensure employees are competent and comfortable in undertaking the core functions of their job.
- Consider implementing personal development/training plans which require individuals to identify development/training opportunities which can then be discussed with management.
- Link training to performance monitoring arrangements to ensure it is effective and sufficient.

#### ***Working patterns***

- Review working hours and shift work systems – have these been agreed with staff?
- Consider changes to start and end times to help employees to cope with pressures external to the organisation (e.g. child care, poor commuting routes etc).
- Develop a system to notify employees of unplanned tight deadlines and any exceptional need to work long hours.



### ***Physical environment and violence***

- Ensure your risk assessments for physical hazards and risks are up to date.
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse. Take steps to deal with this in consultation with employees and others who can help (e.g. the police, charities).
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations (e.g. difficult phone calls, aggressive members of the public).

#### **Do . . .**

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding.
- Provide realistic deadlines.
- Provide adequate training and resources for doing the job.
- Design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Provide sufficient challenge/pressure to keep staff motivated and interested in their work.
- Attend to the physical environment – take steps to reduce unwanted distraction, disturbance, noise levels, vibration, dust etc where possible.
- Assess the risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it.

#### **Don't . . .**

- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do.
- Encourage staff to take work home with them.
- Allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it.
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours.
- Ask young people (under 18 years of age) to take on work that may be beyond their emotional maturity.



## Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Control

### ***Possible solutions***

- Agree systems that enable staff to have a say over the way their work is organised and undertaken, e.g. through project meetings, one-to-ones, performance reviews.
- Hold regular discussion forums during the planning stage of projects to talk about the anticipated output and methods of working. Provide opportunities for discussion and input.
- Allocate responsibility to teams rather than individuals to take projects forward:  
discuss and define teams at the start of a project;—
  - agree objectives;—
  - agree roles;—
  - agree timescales;—
  - agree the provision of managerial support, e.g. through regular progress — meetings.
- Talk about the way decisions are made – is there scope for more involvement?
- Talk about the skills people have and if they believe they are able to use these to good effect. How else would they like to use their skills?

### **Do . . .**

- Allow staff some control over the pace of their work.
- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision-making.
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work.
- Negotiate shift-work schedules.

### **Don't . . .**

- Monitor employees' movements in detail (including breaks).
- Monitor working style, unless necessary (e.g. where there are child protection needs).
- Ask staff to stay late without notice.



## **Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Support**

### ***Possible solutions***

- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to talk about any emerging issues or pressures.
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings to discuss unit pressures.
- Include 'work-related stress/emerging pressures' as a standing item for staff meetings and/or performance reviews.
- Seek examples of how people would like to, or have, received good support from managers or colleagues – can these be adopted across the unit?
- Ask how employees would like to access managerial support, e.g. 'open door' policies, or agreed times when managers are able to discuss emerging pressures.
- Introduce flexibility in work schedules (where possible) to enable staff to cope with domestic commitments.
- Develop training arrangements and refresher sessions to ensure training and competencies are up to date and appropriate for the core functions of employees' jobs.
- Talk about ways the organisation could provide support if someone is experiencing problems outside work.
- Disseminate information on other areas of support (human resources department, occupational health, trained counsellors, and charities).
- Offer training in basic counselling skills/access to counsellors.

### **Do . . .**

- Ensure staff receive sufficient training to undertake the core functions of their job.
- Provide constructive, supportive advice at annual appraisal.
- Provide flexibility in work schedules, where possible.
- Allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence.
- Hold regular liaison/team meetings.
- Provide opportunities for career development.
- Deal sensitively with staff experiencing problems outside work.

### **Don't . . .**

- Trivialise the problems of others.
- Discriminate against people on grounds of sex, race or disability or any other reason.



## **Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Relationships**

### ***Possible solutions***

- Develop a written policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour at work – communicate this to staff.
- Agree and implement procedures to prevent, or quickly resolve, conflict at work – communicate this to staff.
- Agree and implement a confidential reporting system to enable the reporting of unacceptable behaviour.
- Agree and implement a grievance and disciplinary procedure for dealing with unacceptable behaviour – circulate and/or display these.
- Select or build teams which have the right blend of expertise and experience for new projects.
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations.
- Encourage good communication and provide appropriate training to aid skill development (e.g. listening skills, confidence building etc).
- Discuss how individuals work together and how they can build positive relationships.
- Identify ways to celebrate success (e.g. informal lunches/wash-up meetings at the end of a project).

### **Do . . .**

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams.
- Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers.
- Provide support for staff who work in isolation.
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other.
- Agree which behaviours are unacceptable and ensure people are aware of these.

### **Don't . . .**

- Allow any bullying behaviour or harassment.



## Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Role

### ***Possible solutions***

- Hold team meetings to enable members to clarify their role and to discuss any possible role conflict.
- Display team/department targets and objectives to help clarify unit and individual role.
- Agree specific standards of performance for jobs and individual tasks and review periodically.
- Introduce personal work plans which are aligned to the outputs of the unit.
- Introduce or revise job descriptions to help ensure the core functions and priorities of the post are clear.
- Hold regular one-to-one meetings to ensure individuals are clear about their role and know what is planned for the coming months.
- Develop suitable induction arrangements for new staff – make sure all members of the team understand the role and responsibilities of the new recruit.

### **Do . . .**

- Provide a clear job description.
- Define work structures clearly, so that all team members know who is doing what, and why.
- Give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation.
- Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan).
- Avoid competing demands, such as situations where it is difficult to meet the needs of the business and the customer.

### **Don't . . .**

- Make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (e.g. at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what is required of them, and accepts it.



## **Some things to consider if you have identified a problem with Change**

### ***Possible solutions***

- Ensure all staff are aware of why the change is happening – agree a system for doing this.
- Define and explain the key steps of the change. Ensure employee consultation and support is a key element of the programme.
- Establish a system to communicate new developments quickly.
- Agree methods of communication (e.g. meetings, notice boards, letters, e-mail, feedback forums etc) and frequency (e.g. weekly, monthly).
- Ensure staff are aware of the impact of the change on their jobs.
- Provide a system to enable staff to comment and ask questions before, during and after the change. Have an ‘open door’ policy to help staff who want to talk to their managers about their concerns. Involve staff in discussions about how jobs might be developed and changed.
- Review unit and individual work plans after the change to ensure unit and individual objectives are clear.

### **Do . . .**

- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) takes place.
- Consult staff at an early stage, and throughout the change process.
- Involve staff in the planning process so that they understand how their work fits in.

### **Don't . . .**

- Delay communicating new developments.
- Underestimate the effects of minor changes.



## 6.9 Appendix D – Cookstown District Council case study



**Cookstown**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
*COMHAIRLE CHEANTAR NA COIRRE CRÍOCHAÍ*  
*DISTRICT COUNCIL O COOKESTOWN*

### Work- Related Stress Case Study

#### Cookstown District Council

Geographically positioned within the centre of Northern Ireland, Cookstown District Council (The Council) is a medium sized local authority with a workforce of some 280 employees. It is one of twenty six local authorities across Northern Ireland and as such has a range of statutory functions to fulfil. As well as these statutory obligations the work areas in which the Council is heavily involved in has expanded dramatically over recent years. This expansion of work has brought with it many challenges for Council employees in adapting to, meeting and managing public expectations.

#### Why tackle Work-Related Stress?

In August 2006 the Council identified a number of drivers to review the approach taken in managing work-related stress. These included:

- Concerns over the number of days of sickness absence lost to the Council due to work-related stress.
- Guidance issued by the Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI)
- Challenges and uncertainties for staff arising from the restructuring of local government as part of the Northern Ireland wide Review of Public Administration.
- A need to deliver and develop a co-ordinated approach and build upon actions already undertaken in dealing with stress.



### **Desired Outcomes of the Review.**

The senior management team identified that they wanted the review to:

- Involve the entire workforce meaningfully.
- Identify the extent to which work related stress existed.
- Develop tangible actions to deal with and minimise the causes of stress.
- Reduce the number of sick days lost to the Council due to stress.
- Examine the effectiveness of the processes for helping staff deal with stress.
- Ensure that a healthy working environment existed for all employees
- Measure and consolidate on actions taken by Council to date.

*“The review provided the opportunity to identify and address the root causes of stress in our Council and reshape if necessary our existing mechanisms for dealing with the issue.”*

*Ivor Paisley, Director of Corporate Services*

### **The Review: Process Design & Methodology.**

#### ***Preparatory Work.***

A project delivery team who would steer the process was formed which had the support of the Council’s Health and Safety committee, senior management and employee representatives.

#### ***Consultation.***

The delivery team decided that the consultation process would follow the principles contained within the stress management standards. The HSE stress indicator questionnaire was used as the survey tool to measure Council’s performance in managing work related stress. Four cross functional departmental focus groups were formed to substantiate and discuss further the results obtained.

The focus groups provided a free and open forum where staff could exchange and put forward views on how they felt the Council was performing in helping employees deal with stress. Discussion at the meetings was facilitated by trained facilitators from within the Council with some HSENI assistance. The meetings were structured to explore further why the survey results were as identified; prioritise specific areas for action; and explore potential solutions for inclusion in the final corporate stress management action plan.



### ***Current Provision.***

The delivery team undertook an in-depth review of the current level of provision and care available to staff for dealing with work related stress before embarking upon the development of an action plan.

### ***Action Plan Development.***

The final piece in the jigsaw was the development of a corporate stress management action plan. It was recognised that the plan needed to be robust and flexible and attract the support of management and employees. The plan focused on:

- Departmental team meetings
- Cross departmental team building
- Induction programmes
- Communication of current stress management provision
- Communicating organisational change
- Exploration of flexible working opportunities
- Early back to work interviews.
- Promotion of health and well being.

### **Challenges of the Process.**

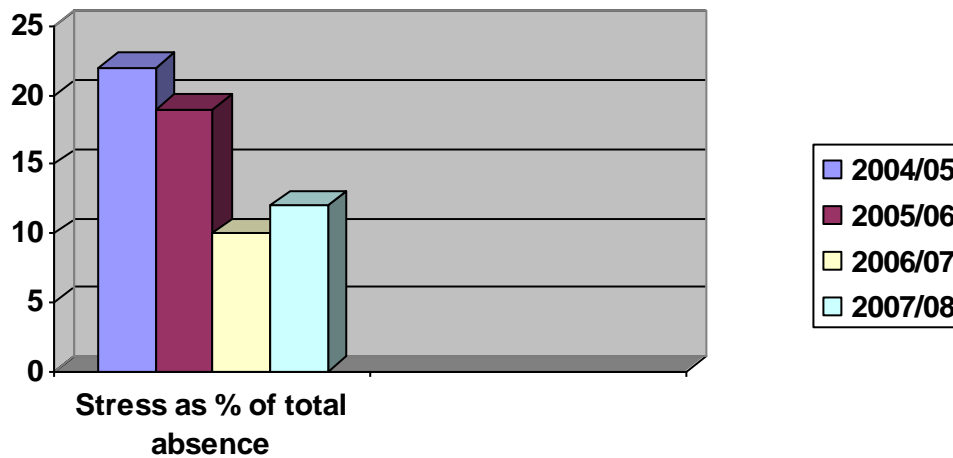
A number of challenges were encountered by the delivery team in undertaking the project. Sticking to a tight project timetable was difficult as different departments had their own priorities which they were striving to achieve. It was also not easy maintaining the consistent momentum required to deliver the programme of work.

Some employees were cynical that the project would achieve any tangible outcomes and a challenge in itself was the gaining of trust in the staff undertaking the process, however once trust was gained we obtained a high response rate to our stress survey assessment, constructive participation in the focus groups and proactive co-operation in helping to start to deliver actions that had been agreed.

### **Delivering - Key Outcome and Benefits?**

With the key outcome from the whole process being the development of a corporate stress management action plan, a number of clear, tangible benefits have been achieved from its implementation. These include:

- Reduction in stress absence levels (see chart).
- Greater ease amongst staff around change due to enhanced communication.
- Enhanced appreciation and knowledge of staff on what other Departments do.
- An increased use of Council's Occupational Health Service, both through self and management referral, helping to promote employee wellbeing.
- Greater uptake of elements of Council's Employee Assistance Programme.
- An increased uptake of training and development opportunities offered.



*“Whilst having responsibility and a duty to deliver a range of functions and services to the public Council also has an equally important duty of care for its employees. I am confident steps taken through our stress management action plan will benefit everyone”*

*MJ McGuckin, Chief Executive, Cookstown District Council*

### **The Process – What worked well?**

From inception to completion, the overriding element of success was in having an open and transparent process which involved all levels of the workforce and one in which there was active communication from early on. The input and support given by HSENI proved absolutely critical in providing direction and technical advice on work related stress at the outset with the senior management team and throughout the process with the project delivery team.



## 6.10 Appendix E – Cookstown District Council case study



**Cookstown**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMHAIRLE CHEANTAR NA COIRRE CRÍOCHAÍ  
DISTRICT COUNCIL O COOKESTOWN

### ***Work Related Stress Action Plan – Cookstown District Council***

Corporate Services Department  
April 2007



## Corporate Stress Management Action Plan 2007/ 2009 – Cookstown District Council

Issue Identified	Action Required	Responsibility	Priority (low, medium, high)	Relevant Management Standard/ Stressor
Lack of clarity on duties performed by employees and taking on of conflicting priorities. Employees not involved in deciding upon how they do their work	Departmental management to routinely meet with staff on a one-to-one basis and undertake formal/ informal feedback appraisals to ensure staff are clear of their roles and responsibilities	Heads of Department	High	Demands Managers Support Role Control
Increasing demands being placed on staff with workload unevenly shared	Bi-monthly departmental team meetings – opportunity for staff to discuss the work they have been involved in and to help one another	Heads of Department & Senior Managers	Medium	Demands Managers Support Peer Support
Limited knowledge shown by employees of work undertaken by other departments generating a lack of corporate identity	Cross departmental facilitation of an annual programme of social and team building events to encourage cohesiveness internally and externally	Corporate Services	Medium	Relationships Peer Support



Issue Identified	Action Required	Responsibility	Priority (low, medium, high)	Relevant Management Standard/ Stressor
Lack of knowledge of current staff care provision	Develop an ongoing information campaign on current measures provided – to encourage uptake	Corporate Services	Medium	All
Uncertainty leading to worry about security of employment within local government	Setting up of a cross-departmental committee to communicate and channel information to all staff on review of public administration developments	Heads of Department & Corporate Services	High	Role Change Manager Support
Desire to work more flexibly to varying degrees offered by flexible working opportunities	To undertake an investigation into flexible working opportunities available and to review the success of the current flexible working system	Corporate Services	Medium	Demands Control
Stagnation of absentee figures over periods 2004-05 to 2006-07 (absolute terms)	<p>All employees returning after a period of leave due to work related stress receive a back to work interview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For an early return to work of an employee - develop <i>individual</i> intervention strategies</li> </ul>	Corporate Services (Personnel) & Heads of Department	High	All



Issue Identified	Action Required	Responsibility	Priority (low, medium, high)	Relevant Management Standard/ Stressor
Staff development opportunities being delivered on an ad-hoc basis	Fostering and developing a culture of change management amongst heads of department and senior management to help staff cope with change	Heads of Department	High	Change Relationships Manager Support
Lack of clarity on responsibility for health and well being in Council	Develop and formalise a health and well policy	Corporate Services	High	All

### Monitoring & Review

To measure the success of Cookstown District Council in responding to the issues identified from the questionnaire and views solicited from the focus groups through the action plan, a further questionnaire will be undertaken in 2009 to ascertain its impact on improving performance achieved in managing work related stress and positively addressing the management standards as developed by HSE (UK). A further corporate stress management action plan will be developed on the basis of the 2009 questionnaire results to take effect from 1 April 2010.

Corporate Services Department will also periodically review the implementation of the action plan and inform Senior Management Team, through the Director of Corporate Services, of areas requiring attention where required.