



HUMAN RESOURCE (HR) IMPLICATIONS SECTION 8





8.0 HUMAN RESOURCE (HR) IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

Pressure regularly occurs in the workplace and is a recognised motivator. Excessive pressure, however, can lead to stress, which undermines performance, is costly to employers and can make people ill.

According to the 2011 CIPD/Simply Health Absence Management survey, stress is, for the first time, the most common cause of long-term sickness absence. Stress is the single largest cause of occupational ill health in the public sector, accounting for around half of all days lost to work related ill health.

Councils who put in place the interventions that are outlined in this Toolkit will be taking steps to minimise work related stress within their organisation. However despite these interventions, it is likely that there may still be circumstances where further action may need to be taken. This section considers those actions and the options that councils, as employers, will have. In particular it provides guidance on:

- Strategic Context
- People Strategies
- Employers' Duties
- Employees' Duties
- Stress Management
- Stress Policy
- Training
- Management Competencies

8.2 Strategic Context

Local Government Culture and Climate

In the current economic climate and in light of budgetary pressures, councils are currently considering efficiency measures including reviewing staff structures, voluntary severance strategies, suppressing of vacancies, recruitment freezes, etc. – all of which impact on the stress management and personal resilience of staff in local government.

Local Government Modernisation and Reform

To support councils as they strive to continue to deliver high quality, efficient services in an increasingly challenging economic environment the Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Programme, led by local government, defines existing collaboration and offers a way to extend the practices of the sector. Its aim is to identify, share and implement opportunities for councils to engage in a variety of initiatives to deliver services in new and innovative ways on a local, sub-regional and regional basis.

With an HR context examples of collaboration projects include:

- exploring the potential benefits of jointly procuring occupational health service provision and employee assistance programmes



- developing model policies for implementation on a consistent basis across the sector
- designing a competence framework for local government

People and Organisation Development Strategic Framework for Local Government Northern Ireland

It is recognised that every council is in a different position in relation to workforce challenges, so needs to decide their own particular priorities, within the regional context.

The People and Organisation Development Strategic Framework is designed to support the vision of effective local government and provides a route map to assist councils to anticipate and tackle future workforce challenges to:

- achieve the effective, efficient, and economic use of people resources in local government to deliver high quality services
- prepare staff for the change challenges and reorganisation
- enhance career opportunities for staff
- address affirmative action issues

The implementation of this Strategic Framework across local government will assist councils to meet the people and organisation development challenges presented by the reform of local government.

The Strategic Framework recognises that support for the well being of each individual employee must be at the core of all People and Organisation Development activity. The Strategic Framework can be accessed on the Commission's website www.lgsc.org.uk

8.3 People Strategies

The Local Government Staff Commission for NI (the Commission) aims to be the strategic organisation for the development of human resource management and the promotion of excellence through people in the delivery of local government services in NI.

One of the Commission's key performance areas is to ensure, productive and harmonious working environments and staff/management relationships are sustained within local government. An agreed strategic activity is to assist councils to develop actions and initiatives to reduce employee sickness absence and promote health and well being.

The Commission is continuing to work in partnership with PPMA – local government's professional HR group – to develop a model attendance and capability policies for the sector.

8.4 Employers' Duties

Employers have a common law duty to provide their employees with a safe system of work and to take steps to protect them from risks that are reasonably foreseeable. Currently there are no regulations dealing specifically with stress. However, there are implied duties to tackle stress as detailed in Section 1. In addition councils should be mindful of:



- Legal requirements for consultation with employees and their representatives in relation to managing the risk of work related stress.
- Equality obligations such as bullying and harassment has been identified as one of the top three causes of work related stress.
- Provisions of the Working Time Regulations 1998, as amended. A failure to do so could result in claims by employees and enforcement proceedings by HSE NI and/or relevant authority.
- It is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee who is disabled. Employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments where any arrangements made by them place the disabled employee at a substantial disadvantage compared with non disabled employees. In the context of stress related illness this may include:
 - Reducing or changing the employee's hours of work on a temporary basis
 - Allocating some of the employee's duties to another employee on a temporary basis
 - Allowing the employee to work from home, where possible
 - Allowing the employee time off to attend counselling or therapy.

8.5 Employees' Duties

Employees have a legal duty to:

- Avoid knowingly putting themselves or others at risk through their own acts or omissions
- Work safely, use protective equipment provided by the employer and co-operate with the employers reasonable instructions intended for health and safety purposes
- Report anything at work that might be a risk to themselves or others

8.6 Stress Management

It is important that the aim of any stress management initiatives should:

- Show that the council take stress seriously
- Show an understanding towards people who admit to being under too much pressure
- Encourage managers to have an open and understanding attitude to what people say to them about the pressures of their work and to look for signs of stress in their staff.
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(See sections 3 – 7 for the various aspects of stress risk assessment and management)

8.7 Stress Policy

An effective stress policy should contain:

- A definition of stress
- Details of the organisational responsibilities assigned to roles with regard to stress, e.g. managers, human resource managers, health and safety/well being officers and employees
- A description of the systems and procedures in place to either eliminate, minimise, control or treat stress in the workplace



- A mechanism to regularly review the policy to incorporate changes within the organisation.

Section 2 provides an example of a council stress policy.

8.8 Training

Stress management training should be provided for the following groups:

- **Senior Management Team**

Commitment from senior management is crucial to the success of any stress initiatives. Senior management should be trained on their legal responsibilities, what stress is and the benefits of taking action

- **Supervisory / line management staff**

Staff with responsibility for the health and safety of other employees should:

- Understand the nature of stress and its effect on performance
- Understand their legal responsibilities relating to work related stress
- Know how to carry out on going risk assessments for stress
- Be aware of how to effectively support and rehabilitate staff who have been off work due to work related stress.

- **Employees**

All employees must understand what stress is and what they, as individuals, can do to help manage it. Subjects covered in training include:

- What is meant by the term stress
- Common causes and effects of stress
- Effective strategies to help prevent stress

Section 7 on stress interventions provides more information on training.

8.9 Management Competencies

The HSE, in association with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Investors in People, have conducted research into management competencies. The findings from phase two of the research have been incorporated into the framework of line management behaviour and stress at work – RR63 Management Competencies for Preventing and Reducing Stress at Work, available from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr633.htm>

The framework is broken down into four main competency areas:

1. Respectful and responsible: this area incorporates integrity, managing emotions and having a considerate approach.
2. Managing and communicating existing and future work: this area incorporates proactive work management, problem solving and being participative and empowering.



3. Reasoning/managing difficult situations: this includes competencies of managing conflict, including bullying and harassment, taking responsibility for resolving issues and managing organisational resources.
4. Managing individuals within the team: this area sees the manager as being personally accessible, sociable and providing empathic engagement (e.g. treating employees as individuals).

A self assessment questionnaire is also available on the HSE website.