WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Executive Director of Corporate Services

Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee – 21 March 2012
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Subject: Stress Management Policy

1.   Purpose

1.1   The purpose of this report is to ask the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee to approve the revised Stress Management Policy and Procedure which will replace the current Stress in the Workplace Policy.

1.2   The report provides Committee with the rationale for implementing a revised Policy and a summary of the key elements of the new Policy. Committee is further asked to agree to the proposed implementation arrangements.

2.   Background

2.1   The current Stress in the Workplace Policy and Procedure was implemented in 2003. Following an external inspection by H.M. Inspector of Health and Safety (Occupational Health), a number of actions were agreed to support the Council to build on the management of work related stress. A key action was the review of the Stress Policy to provide an effective framework where the risk from work related stress was effectively managed and controlled.

2.2   A full review of the existing policy was carried out by the Stress Steering group in consultation with a number of stakeholders.

3.   Main Issues

3.1   The proposed new Stress Management policy was developed as a result of feedback, benchmarking and research into best practice. The aim of the policy is to establish an effective and consistent approach to the prevention and management of work-related stress throughout the Council.

Stress Management Policy

3.2   The policy builds on the Council's obligation to address stress in the workplace through the adoption of the Heath and Safety Executive's (HSE) Stress Risk Assessment Framework. This framework demonstrates good practice through a step by step risk assessment approach and helps demonstrate a commitment to dealing with stress.

3.3   The HSE Stress Risk Assessment Framework ensures that the Council is following best practice and will no longer focus solely on an employee risk assessment approach but will incorporate a risk assessment process which can be undertaken at three different levels. This approach allows an

appropriate risk assessment of the situation to be undertaken and enable management to decide on practical improvements that can be made to reduce the cause of stress. The 3 approaches are:

1. General Stress Risk Assessment

    This risk assessment focuses on the entire workforce and will be developed as an Organisational Action Plan. This provides a framework to monitor and evaluate stress across the organisation and enable actions to be identified that allow the Council to proactively manage stress at an organisational level

2. Generic Stress Risk Assessment

    This risk assessment focuses on identifying high risk groups of employees at the departmental level by utilising available management information. This provides service managers with a tool to identify specific issues which might impact on the team, and provides a framework to explore problems and identify solutions.

3. Individual Stress Risk Assessment

    This risk assessment approach would be used when an employee is experiencing stress. This can be through direct notification from the employee or identified by management. As pressure affects everyone differently tailored control measures may need to be put in place and this enables the manager to work with the employee to take appropriate actions to eliminate or reduce stress and also to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the action.

Consultation

3.4   A number of key stakeholders were consulted during the development of the new Policy. This included: Stress Steering Group; Health and Safety representatives; Occupational Health representatives and the Trades Unions. This approach provided meaningful input into the development of the policy.

3.5   The Trades Unions recognise the need to ensure an effective framework is in place to address stress issues within the organisation. The Trades Unions were fully committed to the development of the new Policy and Procedure and the final draft of the Stress Management Policy was discussed with the Trades Unions at the Employee Liaison Group meeting on 30 January 2012. Following discussions it was agreed that the Policy would be submitted to the Corporate and Efficient Governance Committee on 21 March 2012 for approval with a proposed implementation date of 1 April 2012.

4.   People Implications

4.1   The implementation of the new policy will provide employees and managers with a more comprehensive framework to manage stress proactively and aims to reduce workplace stress throughout the Council.

4.2   The success of the policy relies on the commitment from senior managers to promote the policy and create a culture where all employees feel that stress can be discussed openly with a joint approach to identify solutions.

4.3   To support Managers in the implementation of the policy HR&OD will provide a programme of training prior to the roll-out of the new policy and trade union representatives will be invited to jointly deliver this training.

5.   Financial Implications

5.1   Sickness absence costs result in significant direct and indirect costs to the Council. Stress is within the top 3 reported reasons for sickness absence and in 2010/2011 it was identified that 12,000 FTE days were lost within the Council due to stress related absence. This is an approximate cost of £1,000,000. A proactive approach to management of work related stress should contribute to reduction in stress related absence.

5.2   The Council has a legal and moral duty to ensure that their employees are not injured or made ill because of the work they do. Failure to meet this duty can result in financial costs associated with increased indemnity Insurance costs and risk of litigation claims against the Council.

6.   Risk Analysis

6.1   The main risks to the Council is by not fulfilling the actions identified by the Stress Steering Group is that the Council will fail to demonstrate to HSE Inspectors that it has an effective framework in place to manage work related stress and comply with law.

7.   Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

7.1   An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed on the proposed new policy and identified no impact on any specific equalities group. The policy promotes equality of opportunity across all equality strands and protected characteristics.

8.   Strategic Assessment

8.1   The Council has identified four main strategic priorities namely: Social & Economic Regeneration; Financial Strategy; Asset Management Strategy; and Fit for Purpose Services.

8,2   The Stress Management Policy contributes to Council's strategic priorities by ensuring that our services are fit for purpose, staff health and wellbeing is

considered and staff morale and employee engagement is increased through the effective management of work related stress.

9.   Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1   A full review of the Council's Stress in the Workplace Policy has been undertaken in consultation with a number of key stakeholders. This has led to the development of a new Stress Management Policy and Procedure.

9.2   The aim of the new Stress Management Policy is to establish an effective and consistent approach to the prevention and management of work-related stress throughout the Council and follow the HSE management standards.

9.3   Members are asked to note:

(1) that consultation with the trades unions on the final draft Policy was concluded at the Employee Liaison Group meeting in January.

(2) that a training framework will be put in place to support implementation of the new Policy and trades union representatives will be invited to jointly deliver the sessions.

9.4   Members are asked to approve the revised policy and the recommendations for implementation with effect from 1 April 2012.

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21st March 2012

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Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Stress Management Policy Appendix 2- Stress Risk Assessment Framework
Background Papers:	HSG218 – Managing the Causes of Workplace Stress, Health and Safety Executive
Wards:	All