

Stress Audit

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

To bring to the attention of the Human Resources Committee the results of the 2009 Stress Audit and resulting activities either already undertaken or planned.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

Under UK law, employers have a legal duty of care to ensure that their employees are not harmed by work-related stress. They also have a duty to assess the risk arising from hazards at work, including stress. In November 2004 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) introduced Management Standards and guidelines on work-related stress to help organisations meet these duties.

The Management Standards for work-related stress use a risk assessment approach, based on the HSE's standard 'Five steps to risk assessment'. The guidance is based on a collective, proactive approach, which research has shown has the most positive effect on worker health. The five steps are:

Step 1 Identify the hazard

What are the 'risk factors'?

Step 2 Decide who may be harmed and how

Assess how our staff are affected by the 'risk factors'.

Step 3 Evaluate the risk

Use the results to identify areas of concern.

Step 4 Record the findings

Develop an action plan to target those areas.

Step 5 Monitor and review

Implement the plan and repeat the process after a few years to objectively measure improvement against the Management Standards.

Research has shown that there are six stress 'risk factors', which are the major contributors to work-related stress. These are:

1. Work **demands** placed on staff
2. The **control** someone has over planning their work
3. The **support** they receive to do their work from their managers and their peers
4. Their **relationships** with their work colleagues
5. Understanding their **role** within the organisation
6. How **informed** they are about change

These 'risk factors' form the basis of the HSE's Management Standards and were specifically designed into its Stress Questionnaire. The HSE also provide a tool that enables organisations to assess the results obtained from the questionnaire and benchmark those results against other organisations in the UK.

In October 2008, Policy Group agreed to use the HSE's Stress Questionnaire to undertake a Stress Audit across the whole Service. The audit was conducted by Opinion Research Services (ORS), on behalf of the Brigade, between January and February 2009. The Stress Questionnaire was distributed to 650 employees and 447 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 69%. This is a good rate and is similar to that achieved with the Cultural Audit.

This report summarises the results obtained from the Audit, at the Service and Directorate level, and details activities proposed or taken, showing how the Service could complete Stages 3 and 4 of the (above) Stress Management Standards.

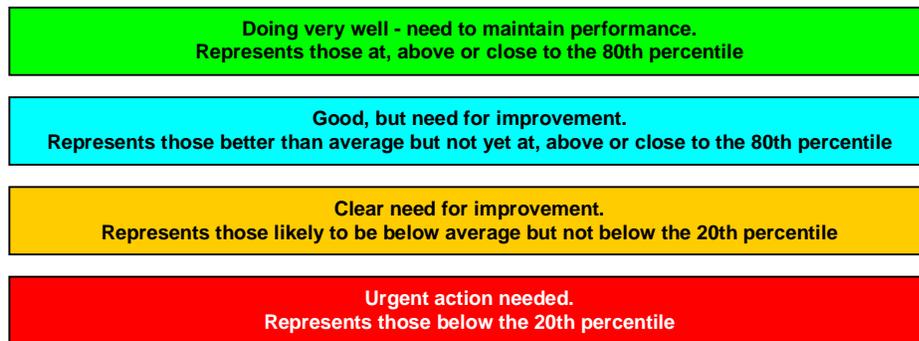
4 Stress Audit Results

Members should note the following points before considering the results in detail:

- The 'Risk Factor' relating to 'Support' has been modeled in the HSE Tool in two parts: the support people receive from their managers; and the support they receive from their peers. The tool, therefore, reports results against 7 factors, rather than just the 6 Stress Risk Factors.
- The tool will not allow us to look at grouped results, where there are less than 12 responses in that group. This helps to prevent the operator from being able to identify a particular individual's responses.

With only 7 responses from the Resources Department, it has not been possible to report the specific results for that Directorate.

- There appears to have been some confusion amongst staff, as to which Directorate they belong to. This will have some impact on the accuracy of the results reported, especially for the smaller Directorates. This will need to be explored and, where possible, rectified during the Directorate analysis work.
- The HSE Tool gives a score for the organisation against each of the 'Stress Risk Factors'. It also uses the results obtained from many other organisations, to provide a benchmark scale for those scores. It uses a colour coding scheme (see below) to indicate where the organisation's results are in comparison to the top 20%, average, and bottom 20% of organisations nationally.



The table below summarises the results obtained for the Service as a whole. Where appropriate, it gives suggested interim and long-term targets that would help to ensure the Service is working towards getting into the top 20% of organisations.

Brigade	SFRS Results	Suggested Interim Target	Suggested Longer Term Target
Demands	3.55	3.55	3.55
Control	3.34	3.43	3.72
Managers' Support	3.78	3.78	3.78
Peer Support	4.00	4.00	4.00
Relationships *	4.03	4.04	4.04
Role	4.22	4.26	4.31
Change	3.25	3.25	3.25

The Service is within the top 20% of organisations for four of the seven factors – **Demands, Manager’s Support, Peer Support, and Change.**

It has above average performance for another two factors – **Relationships** and **Understanding their Role**.

The Brigade's main strategic area for improvement appears to be in relation to the level of **control** that people feel they have over their work. The specific questions asked relating to this factor were:

- *I can decide when to take a break*
- *I have a say in my own work speed*
- *I have a choice in deciding how I do my work*
- *I have a choice in deciding what I do at work*
- *I have some say over the way I work*
- *My working time can be flexible*

With regard to this aspect, Members will note that it is perhaps unsurprising that as an emergency service our staff feel that they do not have much control over when and how they work or when and how they take a break. We would, therefore, have expected to perform less well against this criterion than other workplaces.

Whilst this high level assessment of the results provides a useful overall feeling for how the Service is performing in relation to stress management, greater value comes from looking at the results amongst smaller groups of staff. Members should note that the variation in results at the smaller group level is significant and, therefore, although Service-wide stress initiatives will be of some benefit, greater benefit is likely to come from initiatives that specifically target the issues that exist within a particular department or section.

5 Policy Group's Action Plan

The following actions were then agreed at Policy Group with the aim of ensuring that the Service is able to demonstrate it is implementing the Stress Management Standards effectively.

1. That the Equality and Diversity Team use the monitoring data to identify any correlation between the stress audit results and the seven Equality Strands;
2. That an Order on 'Stress in the workplace' be developed by the Health and Safety Officer;
3. That Policy Group receive a briefing on stress, to ensure they have a good awareness of its causes, impact and methods of preventing it;
4. That each Head of Directorate hold a meeting with staff to analyse the results for their area and develop a proposed Directorate Stress Improvement Plan (DSIP);

5. That the proposed DSIPs be reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Strategy Group (E&DSG) in the presence of the representative bodies, to ensure:
 - a. There is consistency in the approach across all departments;
 - b. Those initiatives required across the whole Brigade are identified and planned for; and
 - c. Any resource issues are identified and fed into the strategic planning process.
6. That Directorate Heads report progress against their DSIP's to the E&DSG
7. That the Stress Audit be repeated to measure the progress made.

The E&DSG have suggested that future audits of staff, including Stress and Cultural Audits should continue to be staggered. This ensures that the Service is getting a regular snapshot of the Service's culture and that 'survey fatigue' is avoided.

The briefing session for Policy Group members took place in July 2009 and the analysis meetings took place over August and September 2009, with the Equality and Diversity Steering Group considering the results at its meetings in September and December 2009.

6 Representative Bodies' Feedback

The representative bodies participated in discussion about the audit and appropriate activities arising from it and it was broadly agreed that the following actions should be taken to address the issues raised:

- Departmental structures to be clarified to staff so that each individual's role and function is clear to them
- Management development programme to be looked at in terms of providing skills for positive reinforcement and praise for staff
- A summary of the audit results to be published in 'The Pink' newsletter along with advice about who employees should contact if they have any concerns
- Executive Officers will emphasis that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated during their next annual visits to each department and watch. This will be supported by a Chief Fire Officer's newsletter.
- The current revision of the bullying and harassment Brigade Order will include a flow chart, explaining what individuals should do, if they feel they are being bullied or harassed.

7 Next steps

The next stage is to begin work on the activities, outlined at section 6 above, during the first quarter of 2010. Following that, we will have further discussion with the representative bodies about future audits to monitor progress on these issues.

8 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report. The activities identified can be accommodated within existing resources.

9 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

10 Equality Impact Assessment

This report details the findings of the recent Stress Audit and the discussion regarding planned action to be taken as a result. An Equality Impact Assessment does not, therefore, need to be conducted.

11 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report

12 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	
Capacity	*	Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	*
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	*
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	