
FULL COUNCIL REPORT

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Report Author	Alyn Dinham
Service Area	Human Resources
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	27 th June 2018

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

Workplace Stress Survey

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 In the summer of 2017, the Council ran its first ever workplace stress survey. The aim of the survey was to find out how Council staff felt about workplace stress.
- 1.2 This report presents the main findings of the 2017 workplace stress survey.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that

- 2.1 Councillors, Directors and Managers are to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the Council's Workplace Stress Policy and take appropriate action as required.
- 2.2 Teams which have exceeded one or more trigger points to receive additional guidance from the Council's Health & Safety Team.
- 2.3 The workplace stress survey should be repeated annually to enable comparisons to be made over time.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Council is under a legal duty to assess the risks arising out of its work activities and to put in place suitable and proportionate measures to reduce those risks to the lowest level reasonably practicable. This includes the risks arising from work-related stress, defined by the HSE as '*a harmful reaction people have to undue pressures and demands placed on them at work*'.

- 3.2 At present, the Council neither asks for nor collects data on the reasons behind work related sickness absence. It is therefore impossible to know how much of our reported sickness absence is caused or made worse by workplace stress.
- 3.3 In the UK, the total number of cases of work related stress in 2016/17 was 526,000; a rate of 1,610 per 100,000 workers.* When this rate is applied to MTCBC, it equates to 39 cases of work related stress per year (*based on a headcount figure of 2447*).
- 3.4 In an attempt to estimate the prevalence of work-related stress in its workforce, the Council asked all of its non-school based staff to complete a workplace stress survey between June and August of 2017. The survey was the first of its kind to be run within the Council. It followed the model developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as part of their 'Stress Management Standards' approach to work-related stress.
- 3.5 The departmental structures and team listings used for the survey were kindly provided by the Business Services team, who were also responsible for receiving and collating the survey returns. Their hard work is acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 Between April and May 2017, the Health and Safety team worked with the Business Services section to develop a workplace stress survey. The model used was based on that developed by the HSE. The survey consisted of thirty-five questions covering seven workplace stress themes. Appendix A contains a list of the questions grouped into their respective themes.
- 4.2 The survey was made available to staff in two formats; online and paper copies. Paper copies were important because they allowed the survey to be completed by staff who had no access to a workplace computer, for example, recycling crews and home care workers. The survey was designed to be anonymous; only the employee's work team was identified. This was done because it was felt that anonymity would help maximise the response rate.
- 4.3 The survey returns were collated by Business Services and passed to the Health and Safety team for statistical analysis. A computer spreadsheet was devised to handle the raw data from the survey returns.
- 4.4 To score the questions, a five point system was used ranging from zero to four, where zero meant a low stress level and four meant a high stress level. Being able to score the questions was important. It meant that something as nebulous and intangible as 'stress' could be given a value which could be recorded, checked and compared over time.
- 4.5 The answers from the thirty-five survey questions were turned into numerical values using this five point system. This allowed each question to be given a score. Questions were then grouped by their workplace stress category and a total score produced for each category.

* *Work-related Stress, Depression or Anxiety Statistics in Great Britain*

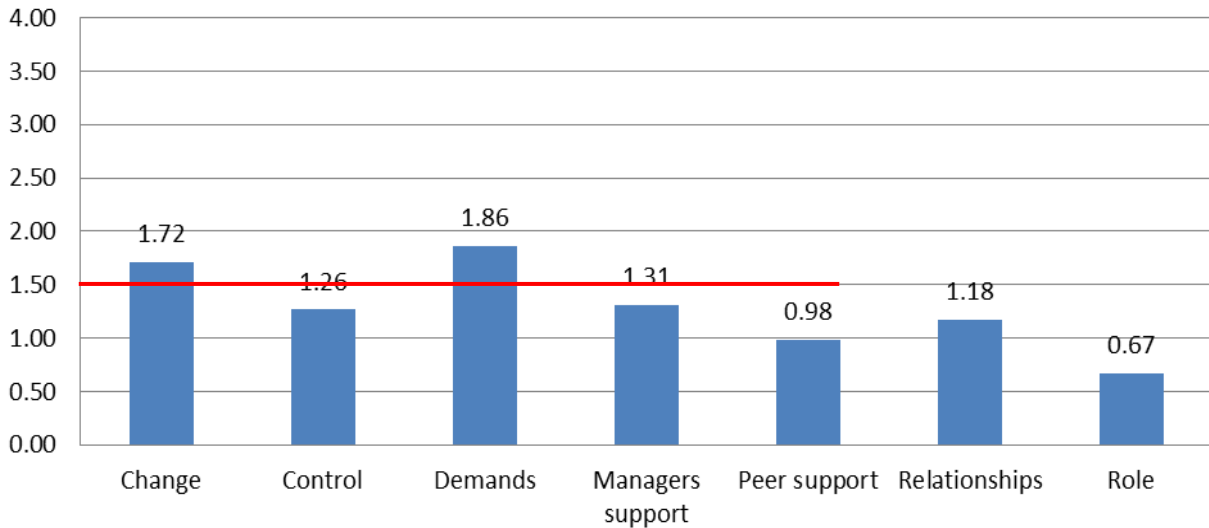
- 4.6 Finally, the stress categories were added together, allowing for an overall 'stress index' to be generated for each team. There are seven categories with a maximum score of '4' in each category. The stress index for a team therefore ranges from 0 to 28.

CATEGORY	RANGE	
Change	0	4
Control	0	4
Demands	0	4
Managers support	0	4
Peer support	0	4
Relationships	0	4
Role	0	4
INDEX RANGE	0	28

5.0 MAIN FINDINGS

- 5.1 A total of 945 staff were asked to take part in the workplace stress survey. Responses were received from 250 members of staff, equating to an overall response rate of 26%.
- 5.2 Between Council departments, the response rate varied greatly, for instance, a 96% response rate within the Community Regeneration team compared to 7% within Parks & Grounds Maintenance.
- 5.3 Departments with a response rate of less than 33% were not analysed further nor included in targeted stress improvement action plans. This is because they were considered to have provided an insufficient number of returns to qualify as a representative sample.
- 5.4 The survey findings suggest that, when averaged and taken as a whole, the staff of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council were not reporting high levels of workplace stress in the summer months of 2017. The average levels of reported workplace stress are shown in the graph below. The higher the bar, the more 'stress' is being reported in that category:

Merthyr Tydfil CBC - Summer 2017



5.5 A stress level exceeding '1.50' on the graph is suggested as a trigger point for taking further action. The Workplace Stress Policy provides details of the preventative action that can be taken in each of the seven categories.

5.6 Whilst the Council as a whole may not have reported high levels of workplace stress, there was a different picture within some teams where stress levels were seen to exceed the trigger point in some categories.

Table 1 – Departments ranked in order of their overall 'stress index'

Department / Section		Stress index
1	Children Services & Safeguarding	11.2
2	Corporate Services	10.4
3	Finance	9.0
4	Highways & Engineering	8.9
5	Building Control, Planning & Countryside	8.7
6	Democratic Services	8.3
7	Community Regeneration	7.4
8	HR & Payroll	6.6
9	Corporate Communications	5.5

5.7 This table provides an average stress 'score' for each team, and is ranked from the highest at 11.2 to the lowest at 5.5.

- 5.8 In total, nineteen departments provided responses to the stress survey. Ten teams are missing from the above table. This is because they did not provide a sufficient number of responses.
- 5.9 In all teams, the workplace stressors most often reported fell under two categories; 'Demands' and 'Change'.
- **'Demands' being highlighted indicates:** a significant percentage of staff have reported that they feel unable to cope with the demands of their job.
 - **'Change' being highlighted indicates:** a significant percentage of staff have reported that they feel that the Council does not sufficiently engage them when organisational change is taking place.
- 5.10 Extracts from the Workplace Stress Policy are included at Appendix B. They cover the action required to deal with workplace stress under the 'Demands' and 'Change' categories.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The 2017 workplace stress survey was the first of its kind to be run in MTCBC. It generated a 26% response rate overall.
- 6.2 Nine teams provided a statistically relevant response rate. Three of these reported levels of workplace stress which exceeded the suggested trigger point for action.
- 6.3 Two workplace stress themes stood out as affecting large numbers of staff across the Council. These were 'Demands' and 'Change'.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 There are no financial implications associated with the implementation of the workplace stress survey.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. It has been found that a full assessment is not required at this time. The form can be accessed on the Council's website/intranet via the 'Equality Impact Assessment' link.

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
GARETH CHAPMAN**

**COUNCILLOR ANDREW BARRY
CABINET MEMBER FOR GOVERNANCE
AND CORPORATE SERVICES**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Workplace Stress Policy	13 Dec 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council Intranet• Health & Safety office, Room 415, Civic Centre
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.

Appendix A

The survey questions

The Survey Questions

Category	Question
CHANGE	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work
	Staff are always consulted about change at work
	When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice
CONTROL	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
DEMANDS	Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine
	I have unachievable deadlines
	I have to work very intensively
	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do
	I am unable to take sufficient breaks
	I am pressured to work long hours
	I have to work very fast
	I have unrealistic time pressures
MANAGERS SUPPORT	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do
	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem
	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work
	I am supported through emotionally demanding work
	My line manager encourages me at work
PEER SUPPORT	If work gets difficult my colleagues will help me
	I get help and support I need from colleagues
	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues
	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work related problems
RELATIONSHIPS	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour
	There is friction or anger between colleagues
	I am subject to bullying at work
	Relationships at work are strained
ROLE	I am clear what is expected of me at work
	I know how to go about getting my job done
	I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are
	I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department
	I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation

Appendix B

Workplace Stress Policy extracts:

Guidance on 'Demands and 'Change'

1 Demands

The following guidance can be used to help allocate resources. It is not exhaustive. Further stages may be required for your team or some listed may not be relevant or could be combined into a single step.

The standard	<i>Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs</i>
What should be happening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The department 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.• Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.
Ways to achieve the standard	
Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 regular 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 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 Council (eg child care, poor commuting routes).
- 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, eg the police.
- Provide training to help staff deal with and defuse difficult situations, such as difficult phone calls or aggressive customers.

Do:

- allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding;
- set realistic deadlines;
- design jobs that provide stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills 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 other inherent risks of the work, eg physical and verbal abuse, musculoskeletal disorders and take steps to deal with them;
- provide support to those less experienced or under pressure;
- if you're a team leader, learn to say no to work if your team is already at full capacity.

Don't:

- ask people to do tasks that they are not capable of or trained to do;
- 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, starting earlier, finishing later, taking work home or working through breaks and lunch;
- contact staff by phone or email (even when they have equipment provided by the Council) outside of working hours or when they are on leave or otherwise 'off duty'.

6 Change

How is organisational change, large or small, managed and communicated?

The standard	<i>Employees indicate that the Council engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change.</i>
What should be happening	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Council provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes.• The Council 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.• Employees have access to relevant support during changes.
Ways to achieve the standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 (eg meetings, notice boards, letters, email, feedback forums) and frequency (eg 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, eg for staff who want to raise their concerns.• Review team and individual work plans after the change to ensure objectives are clear and workloads are appropriately distributed.

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;
- explain timescales and how changes will impact directly on them.

Don't:

- delay communicating new developments;
- underestimate the effects of minor changes.