

Title of Report:	Undertaking stress risk assessments using the HSE Stress Indicator Tool and Focus Groups
Report to be considered by:	Resource Management Select Committee
Date of Meeting:	13 September 2010

Purpose of Report: To update RMSC on a new toolkit for undertaking stress risk assessments using the Stress Indicator Tool.

Recommended Action: Heads of Service to consider use of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Indicator Tool in their own service areas

Reason for decision to be taken: To make HoS aware of the tools available to identify and tackle workplace stress.

Other options considered: None

Key background documentation: WBC Organisational Stress Policy

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Implications

Policy: The report raises no specific policy implications

Financial: None

Personnel: In report.

Legal/Procurement: None.

Property: None.

Risk Management:

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2010, Corporate Board considered a report, the purpose of which was to outline possible approaches that the Council could take to tackle stress within the Council.
- 1.2 Corporate Board concluded Heads of Service should undertake the following approach to undertaking risk assessments for work-related stress:
 - Where other indicators (e.g. results of the 2009 Employee Attitude Survey) suggest potential areas of concern, use the HSE Stress Management Standards Indicator Tool to further understand the nature of the issues within the service area.
 - Use the HSE Stress Management Standards Analysis Tool to interpret the results
 - Where the results identify areas of concern, set up facilitated focus groups to further discuss the results of the Indicator Tool, with feedback from the Focus Group forwarded to the Service Management Team for the development of service level action plans.

2. The Stress Management Standards Indicator Tool and Focus Groups

- 2.1 The Indicator Tool is a questionnaire comprising 35 questions, and would be sent to all employees within a service area/team (see Appendix 1). It is designed by the HSE, who have identified six areas of work that it considers, if properly managed, can help reduce stress at work. The six areas are:

Demands – this includes work loads, work patterns and work environment

Control – how much say a person has in the way they do their work

Support – the support a person has from both their manager and peers

Relationships – the extent to which a team promotes positive working and avoiding conflict

Role – whether a person understands his/her role in the organisation

Change – looks at how organisational change is managed

- 2.2 The Indicator Tool asks questions that link to the above categories. It is completed anonymously and returned to Human Resources. The responses are analysed, using the HSE Analysis Tool, which compares the responses from the service area/team against average responses from a sample group of organisations.
- 2.3 The results for each of the 35 questions is colour-coded, to indicate where further action may be required. The colour-coding is as follows:

Green	Doing very well. Need to maintain performance
Blue	Good. Represents a response that is better than average.
Amber	Clear need for improvement. Represents a response below average.
Red	Urgent action needed. Represents a response at or below the bottom 20% of benchmark comparators.

- 2.4 Those results that are highlighted as amber or red require further action and the HSE recommend the use of Focus Groups.
- 2.5 The purpose of a Focus Group is to gain a better understanding of those indicator tool results that are highlighted as amber or red. The group will comprise a random selection of approximately eight employees from the service area/team, in most cases not including managers. The session will be facilitated by two Human Resource Officers/Health and Safety Officer, and will take a maximum of two hours.
- 2.6 The Focus Group is not a decision-making body – the aim of the session is to generate ideas on the action that could be taken to either mitigate the effects of an identified stressor or avoid an issue becoming a stressor.
- 2.7 The ideas generated by the Focus Group will be completely anonymous to anyone outside the group, but will be recorded and fed back to the Service Management Team by the Focus Group facilitators.
- 2.8 It will be the responsibility of the Service Management Team to both determine which suggestions from the Focus Group are feasible and to develop, implement and monitor an action plan.
- 2.9 It should be noted, for a project to be successful, it will need the Head of Service to ‘champion’ the project and commit to both communicating the results to all staff, and to developing, communicating, implementing and monitoring an action plan.
- 2.10 The project will also require commitment from line managers to both encourage team members to participate in the process (i.e. complete the Indicator Tool, participate in a Focus Group if selected) and take an active involvement in communicating, implementing and monitoring the action plan.

3. Pilot Project

- 3.1 A pilot project has been undertaken in Legal and Electoral Services, the results of which have been very encouraging, with only three of the 35 questions from the Indicator Tool highlighted as red and only one highlighted as amber. The response rate was 60%.
- 3.2 A Focus Group was convened to discuss those areas highlighted as red or amber, the results of which were communicated to the Legal and Electoral Service management team. As the service area has already convened a team to implement actions from the 2009 EAS, the actions identified via the Focus Group were linked into the work of this team.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Where a Head of Service considers it would be useful to undertake a stress risk assessment using the Indicator Tool, for example because results of the EAS indicated potential for a high risk of stress within the service, or because a high percentage of sickness absence is stress-related, he/she should get in touch with his/her HR Contact.
- 4.2 The HR Contact will work with the Head of Service to use the Indicator Tool within the service area, analyse the results and, where appropriate, facilitate a Focus Group.
- 4.3 Use of the Indicator Tool is a means of undertaking a stress risk assessment for a group of staff (team or service area). Managers will also need to undertake stress risk assessments with individuals, for example where an individual is returning from a period of stress-related absence.

West Berkshire Council

Indicator Tool

It is recognised that working conditions affect worker well-being. Your responses to the questions will help determine current working conditions, and enable future improvements to be monitored. The questionnaire is based on the Management Standards Indicator Tool, developed by the Health and Safety Executive.

*The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. For each question, tick the box that most accurately reflects your job as it is now. **Please only tick one box per question.***

Responses to the questionnaire are treated anonymously so you will not need to provide your name.

We will need to know where you work so please complete your service area.

Please return the completed form to Alison McBride, Human Resources, Council Offices, Market Street, Newbury RG14 5LD

Service Area

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I am clear what is expected of me at work	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
2	I can decide when to take a break	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
3	Different groups at work demand things from me that are hard to combine	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
4	I know how to go about getting my job done	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
5	I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
6	I have unachievable deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
7	If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
8	I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
9	I have to work very intensively	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
10	I have a say in my own work speed	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
11	I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
12	I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
13	I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
14	There is friction or anger between colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
15	I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
16	I am unable to take sufficient breaks	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
17	I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
18	I am pressurised to work long hours	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
19	I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
20	I have to work very fast	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
21	I am subject to bullying at work	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
22	I have unrealistic time pressures	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
23	I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
24	I get help and support I need from colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
25	I have some say over the way I work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
26	I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
27	I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
28	Staff are always consulted about change at work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
29	I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
30	My working time can be flexible	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
31	My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
32	When changes are made at work I am clear how they will work out in practice	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
33	I am supported through emotionally demanding work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
34	Relationships at work are strained	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
35	My line manager encourages me at work	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

Thank you for completing the questionnaire