

# Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Corporate Management Issues



LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW WORKING GROUP

## STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

April 2008



Making a difference where you live

# CONTENTS

<b>SECTION</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
One	Context, Introduction and Focus of Review	3
Two	Stress in the Workplace	5
Three	Tackling Stress in the County Council's Workforce	7
Four	Conclusions and Recommendations	20
Appendix	Staff Survey Data	23

## Section One – Context, Introduction and Review Focus

### Context

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2007/08 was informed by a number of factors, including views from Corporate Directors, Cabinet Portfolio holders and non-executive members, both individually and collectively.
- 1.2 The work programme consisted of larger (typically cross-cutting) scrutiny projects and a number of smaller light touch reviews.
- 1.3 One of the key aims of the light touch reviews was to promote closer working between officers and members, in looking at specific issues, typically over 3-4 meetings.

### Introduction

- 1.4 The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "**the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them**". It can be caused by things at work, home or both. It makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be positive if managed correctly, and often leads to improved performance. However, when demands and pressure become too much this leads to stress. If intense and prolonged this can lead to mental and physical ill-health.
- 1.5 There are a number of factors that influence an individual's vulnerability to stress. These include:
  - **Personal** - personality, coping strategies, age and training;
  - **Social** - life events, social support, life experiences;
  - **Biological** - inherited factors, injury or disease, medication.
- 1.6 Reactions to stress will vary from one individual to another - and may also vary at different times of our lives – it is important that individuals learn to recognise stress and understand what to do to reduce it.

### Work Related Stress - Issues/ and Challenges

- 1.7 Work related stress is now widely accepted as a major factor leading to employee ill-health and sickness absence. Sickness absence is the single most important systematically reported corporate health

indicator in Local Government. **Nationally, stress is the single greatest cause of absence in Local Government.**

- 1.8 **In Durham County Council, stress it is the single most frequently reported cause of sickness absence.** An audit of such cases seen in the Occupational Health Service (OHS) in the first quarter of 2005/06 found at least a third of employees on long-term sickness absence for stress attributed their problems to difficulties at work.

### **Focus**

- 1.9 It was agreed against the above backdrop that Overview and Scrutiny members, should establish a light touch scrutiny working group to investigate stress management within the Authority; how stress is identified in the workplace; what processes are in place to deal with stress related sickness absence; and the impact of stress related sickness absence on the Authority and the individuals affected by it.

### **Membership and Evidence Taking**

- 1.10 The Review Group met to consider information in relation to stress related sickness absence from September 2007 to March 2008.
- 1.11 **The Review Group consisted of 6 Members (Councillors Armstrong, Coates, Henderson, Iveson, Stradling and Walker). The Group was supported by Tom Bolton, Principal Scrutiny Support Officer, Ann Robinson, Assistant Head of Human Resources, David Atyeo, Development and Performance Manager, Geoff Longstaff, Senior Human Resources officer, Philip Wynn, Senior Occupational Health Physician, Officers from the Stress Management Policy Group and Trade Union Representatives.**

## Section Two – Stress in the Workplace

### Stress In Durham County Council

- 2.1 Although the audit of sickness absence by the County Council's Occupational Health Service (OHS) in the first quarter of 2005/06 found that at least a third of employees on long-term sickness absence for stress attributed their problems to difficulties at work, this may represent an underestimation. Work related stress (WRS) is also associated with chronic musculoskeletal pain (the second most common cause of days lost to long-term sickness absence) and may be less likely to be declared as a cause of short-term absence due to a perceived stigma by colleagues.
- 2.2 Monetary costs from work related stress problems arise from a number of sources, and include poor employee retention, sickness absence (BVPI 12) and ill-health retirement rates (BVPI 15). An increase in the citing of stress issues in employment tribunal actions and civil claims against the County Council has also been noted. A Comprehensive Stress Management Programme (CSMP) should help reduce some of these costs and equally importantly provide evidence of 'good practice' in defence of civil claims against Durham County Council. **Accordingly, the business and social case for addressing work related stress within the County Council is overwhelming.**
- 2.3 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) requires employers to carry out risk assessments to identify and manage risks of this nature. Both statutory and civil law place a duty of care on the employer to provide a safe system of work. The risks are clearly foreseeable, yet there has not been in the past any Council-wide mechanism for managing self-declared stress.
- 2.4 The Comprehensive Performance Assessment process ensures the County Council strives to continuously improve services and ensure those who deliver services perform effectively and efficiently. Employee work related stress can adversely affect these aims by preventing employees performing at their best. Associated absence from work can adversely affect quality and costs of services. Addressing working environment issues will potentially improve morale, commitment and performance, both in employees experiencing such difficulties, as well as to the benefit of their co-workers. Consequently, the Group was advised that an effective Comprehensive Stress Management Programme could prove an element in ensuring the County Council achieved the aim of continuous improvement.

## **A Comprehensive Stress Management Programme**

- 2.5 A Comprehensive Stress Management Programme would help address the challenge posed to Councils to become exemplars of health and safety management practice as set out in national strategies such as *Revitalising Health and Safety* (target to reduce incidence rate of cases of work-related ill-health by 20% by 2010), *Securing Health Together* (to reduce by 30% the number of working days lost due to work-related ill-health and for employees off work due to ill-health or disability to be made aware of opportunities for rehabilitation back into work as early as possible), and *Health, Work and Wellbeing - Caring for Our Future* (a strategy for health and wellbeing of working age people).
- 2.6 The White Paper *Choosing Health* gave Investors in People (IIP) the remit to develop a new 'healthy business assessment' in conjunction with the Department of Health. Future maintenance of the IIP Award by the County Council is likely in part to be impacted on by stress management related issues.
- 2.7 Work related stress management has been identified as an area of interest in the ongoing Health and Safety Executive joint 'Strategy for Safety' project and is the subject of an on-going national audit of Local Authorities. Work related stress has also been identified as an area of action by the County Council to enable progression to a higher level 'Health at Work' Award (by the primary Care Trust), requiring the comprehensive and systematic management of this major occupational health issue. The work undertaken within the Council to date was a significant factor in the achievement of the Bronze Award by the County Council.

### **Risk issues**

- 2.8 The health of the workforce has been identified as a major strategic risk for the County Council and includes work related stress as a major contributory factor.

## Section Three – Tackling Stress in the County Council’s Workforce

### The Stress Management Policy

- 3.1 The Light Touch Review Group were advised that **the Authority recognises that employees are its most valuable asset** and that only through their development in a healthy and safe working environment can they contribute fully to its aims and objectives. Whilst the Council has no control over external factors, as a good employer it wishes to promote the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of all its employees.

### Policy Statement of the Authority

- 3.2 The County Council’s Human Resources Committee approved a Stress Management Policy in June 2007 which includes the following policy statement:

“Durham County Council:

- Is committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of its employees.
- Recognises that work-related stress is a management issue and acknowledges the importance of identifying and reducing work placed stressors.
- Is committed to promoting the health and wellbeing of its staff through, for example, the creation of opportunities for its employees to lead a healthier lifestyle, the provision of information on healthy choices etc.
- Will work towards the Stress Management Standards as identified by the Health and Safety Executive (a summary of the standards is provided on page 10).
- Will identify work place stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate or control as far as practicable the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- Will consult with Trade Union Safety Representatives on proposed actions relating to the prevention of work placed stress.
- Will provide training for managers and supervisory employees in good management practices.

- Will provide confidential counselling for employees affected by stress where appropriate.
  - Will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement this policy”.
- 3.3 The policy covers all employees, except for school-based employees where schools need to give consideration to their own procedures. The policy is recommended as good practice to all other groups associated with the school who have the discretion in their employment to adopt our policies. Apart from schools, this will include such groups as voluntary sector organisations.
- 3.4 All employees have a responsibility to ensure that they comply with the policy and any subsequent processes that are developed to support it. Everyone involved in implementing the policy and any subsequent processes that are developed to support it is responsible for ensuring that it is fairly implemented and must ensure that they:
- Do not breach the Policy or any related processes;
  - Seek advice from Human Resources if unsure of how to implement the Policy;
  - Ensure that they deal with any issues arising equitably without direct or indirect discrimination on grounds of age, disability, nationality, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or trade union membership
- 3.5 As part of the implementation of the policy, a 'Managing Stress' leaflet has been distributed to employees of the County Council which outlines what individuals who believe they are suffering from stress can do; how they raise issues; recognition that there can be problems; and what can be done to resolve them.
- 3.6 The Group was advised that data in relation to stress will be gathered through the management information systems for recording and reporting data in relation to sickness absence, accident reporting, grievance, bullying and harassment procedures, exit interviews and staff surveys. This data will be reviewed within Service Management Teams and by the Corporate Management Team to identify the impact of work related stress within Durham County Council and used to develop any further mechanisms to address significant issues.
- 3.7 The Policy is also available on the County Council's Intranet Policies and Procedures pages and the Work Episodes sites, with new employees informed of the existence of this Policy in recruitment and induction information.



## **Procedures for Managing Stress**

3.8 There are a number of key players within the Council who have role in tackling and managing stress. They include:

- **Managers within individual Services**
- **The Occupational Health Service**
- **Human Resources Staff**
- **Health and Safety officers**
- **The Trade Unions**
- **Employees themselves**

## **Managers**

3.9 Managers have a key role in relation to prevention of work-related stress and management of stress related sickness absence. All managers and supervisors are required to:

- Advise and inform their Team(s) in order to increase awareness and understanding of the Stress Management Policy and any related issues
- Record any work related stress on the corporate accident/incident/ill-health form.
- Conduct and implement recommendations of audits and risk assessments within their jurisdiction.
- Ensure good communication between management and employees, particularly where there are service, organisational or procedural changes.
- Identify training requirements and ensure employees are appropriately trained to discharge their duties.
- Ensure employees are provided with meaningful, developmental opportunities.
- Monitor workloads to ensure that employees are not overloaded
- Monitor working hours and overtime to ensure that employees are not overworking
- Monitor holidays to ensure that employees are taking their full entitlement.

- Attend training as requested in good management practice and health and safety.
- Ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated within their jurisdiction.
- Be vigilant and offer additional support where appropriate to employees experiencing stress outside work.
- Ensure that employees are made aware of the opportunities to participate in health improvement activities and give reasonable support to employees to access them.
- Ensure that concerns, actions and issues are recorded and information passed to Service Management Teams.

## **Employees**

3.10 Likewise, employees have a role in minimising and tackling work related stress. All employees are required to:

- Raise issues of concern, normally, with their Line Manager. (If an employee feels that they cannot raise the issue with their Line Manager they should approach another manager or seek advice from Human Resources or their Trade Union).
- If unsure of how to deal with issues, seek help and advice on Policies and Procedures from their Line Manager, Trade Union or Human Resources.
- Accept opportunities to support approaches to eliminate or reduce the effects of work related stress with managers and supervisors.
- Accept opportunities for counselling and training when recommended.
- Read County Council communications in relation to stress management.
- Recognise that they have a responsibility for their own personal stress and try to help themselves where possible.

## **The County Council's Occupational Health Service**

3.11 The County Council's Occupational Health Service has a key role to play in supporting and advising those employees who are at risk of or suffering from work related stress. Occupation Health:

- Supports individuals who have been absent with stress related ill-health and can advise them and their management on a planned return to work.
- Provides support and advice to individuals who are at work but are experiencing stress related health problems.
- Can refer employees to counsellors or specialist agencies as required.
- Monitors and reviews the effectiveness of measures to reduce stress.
- Informs Services via the Corporate Health and Safety Management Committee of any changes and developments in the field of stress at work.
- Can undertake analysis of periodic work related stress employee questionnaires and feedback to managers and staff representatives in each service area.
- Ensures maintenance of individual employee confidentiality in any data analysis.

### **The Human Resources Division**

3.12 Durham County Council's Human Resources Division officers have a role in tackling/preventing work related stress by:

- Raising awareness of the policy during employee induction, training and development programmes.
- Procuring specialist training on stress awareness and related issues.
- Providing advice and guidance to managers dealing with specific stress related cases.
- Providing support to managers during periods of change in the work environment.
- Providing guidance to managers on the application of the policy.
- In collaboration with the Occupational Health and Health and Safety services, assisting in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address work related stress by periodic collation of relevant statistics, e.g. sickness absence.

## **Health and Safety**

### 3.13 Health and Safety Officers:

- Support the identification of methods of training and supporting managers in undertaking, implementing and interpreting stress risk assessments.
- In collaboration with the Occupational Health and Human Resources services can assist in monitoring the effectiveness of measures to address work related stress by periodic collation of relevant statistics.

## **Trade Union/Safety Representatives**

### 3.14 Trade Union and Safety representatives will be:

- Meaningfully consulted on any changes to work practices or work design to consider whether such changes could precipitate stress.
- Meaningfully involved in the risk assessment and risk management process.
- Provided with access to collective and statistical data.
- Provided with paid time away from normal duties to attend any relevant Trade Union training in accordance with County Council time off policy.
- Allowed reasonable time in accordance with County Council policy to conduct joint inspections of the workplace to ensure that environmental stressors are properly controlled.

## **The Stress Management Policy Toolkit**

### 3.15 The Stress Management Policy contains a Toolkit which includes:

- Health and Safety Executive - Stress Management Standards Summary
- Employee Stress Management process flowchart
- Managing Stress leaflet

- Stress Management questionnaire
- Stress Management Action Plan
- Corporate accident/incident/ill-health report form

### **Health and Safety Executive - Stress Management Standards - Summary**

3.16 The Review Group were advised that the Health and Safety Executive has prepared a set of management standards to help organisations manage the issue of work related stress sensibly and minimise the impact of work-related stress on their businesses. The Management Standards represent a set of conditions that reflect high levels of health, well-being and organisational performance. The standards help organisations to identify the gap between their current performance and those conditions. It also helps organisations to develop your own solutions to close this gap.

3.17 This advice is aimed at anyone with responsibility for tackling work-related stress in their organisation. In different organisations that might be the person who has responsibility for co-ordinating stress risk assessment, human resources managers, health and safety officers, trade union representatives or line managers. The process outlined is not law, but following it can help organisations meet their legal duties. The advice does not replace the health and Safety Executive's existing stress guidance pack '*Real Solutions, Real People*' but provides further practical information, advice and tools on how to assess the risks from work-related stress in organisations.

3.18 The Standards cover a number of areas:

#### **Demands:**

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

#### **Control:**

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way that they do their work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**Support:**

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and managers/supervisors.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**Relationships:**

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours e.g. bullying at work.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**Role:**

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**Change:**

- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing any organisational change.
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

**The Stress Management Questionnaire**

- 3.19 As part of the Stress Management Policy employees will be requested to complete a Stress Management questionnaire. This may happen during either a one-to-one meeting, Appraisal, Return to Work Interview or Sickness Absence interview when a manager should ask each employee if they consider any illness/problem has been caused or made worse by his/her work duties. In the event of an employee identifying that work may have been influential in causing an absence/problem the interviewing Manager should pursue the employee's responses to the Stress Management Questionnaire.
- 3.20 The analysis is linked to the 2004 Health and Safety Executive Management Standards on work related stress and provides the opportunity for managers and the employee to consider appropriate actions to be taken. The employee would complete and return the questionnaire to their line manager before the next meeting with him/her so that they can discuss the issues raised and it can be used to develop an action plan to deal with them. As a result of this meeting the manager will work with the employee to produce an

action plan that will help, where possible to address the issues that have been raised.

### **Action Plans**

- 3.21 The Action Plan used in the Stress Management Policy was agreed by the Corporate Management Team, and the Stress Management Action Group (which includes representatives from all Services). The Plan involves the Manager and the employee in responding to questions (Stress Management Standards) identifying the action to be taken and the timescale for achievement.
- 3.22 The success of the Action Plan will be measured by the improved levels of positive response to stress related questions in the staff survey and reduced levels of stress related sickness absence. In relation to preventing stress and the use of the Action Plan, there are three levels of stress prevention, as follows:
- **Primary prevention** - to eliminate stress at source
  - **Secondary prevention** - to promote coping mechanisms in employees
  - **Tertiary prevention** - it is important that stress related problems are detected as soon as possible and that any individual member of staff suffering the effects of stress receives appropriate support and assistance.

### **Workplace Related Stress Data**

- 3.23 In response to a request for information about work related stress hotspots in the County Council, members of the Light Touch Review Group were advised that available data showed that Mental Health Issues are the most frequent cause of absence in the Council (25%), However it was likely that the percentage was higher, in view of the number of sickness absences that are reported in the 'other category' and the fact that mental health may well be a contributory factor in 'other' causes for absence. A copy of staff survey data submitted to the Group is appended to this report. When looking at hotspots, in relation to smaller departments, with a lower number of staff, the figures can appear to be inflated disproportionately, giving a distorted picture of stress related sickness absence within that Service.
- 3.24 The Group was informed that another problem in relation to analysis of the staff survey was that different Services have asked for results to be produced in different ways which ranged from outcomes for the whole Service to individual Team level. In addition to the survey analysis, two focus groups were used to obtain feedback on the

development of the policy. It was explained that work related stress sickness absence levels had risen over 2007, but it was questioned whether the introduction of the policy and raised awareness had resulted in more sickness absence linked to stress being correctly recorded.

- 3.25 The system of recording approaches by employees to the Lancaster Counselling Service (see below) does not clearly identify stress related sickness absence due to the definition of work related stress. The counsellor would only describe an issue as work related stress when a client's main presenting concern is stress symptoms that they say are attributable to their situation at work and if they described a number of stressful events or issues that included work this would be likely to be recorded as stress.
- 3.26 Data available from Lancaster for the last 2 years was as follows:
- Overall number of calls - 375
  - Calls put down to 'stress' in the 'emotional' section - 14 (3.7% of total)
  - Calls put down to 'employment' overall (this includes relationship problems at work, workload, bullying, discipline and job dissatisfaction) - 111 (29.6%)
  - The percentage by gender is evenly split.
- 3.27 As regards levels of sickness absence (all categories) in District Councils only three had levels lower than the County Council (Easington, Teesdale and Wear Valley). With reference to regional, County and Unitary Comparators, Durham County Council had the second lowest sickness absence rate. There was some uncertainty however, about the basis on which the data had been calculated and whether it was consistent across all authorities (and the County Council). The Group was advised that there would no longer be a requirement for BVPI 12, but the County Council had decided to continue to monitor and report on sickness absence on the same basis.
- 3.28 In relation to national data on the causes of sickness absence the most recent data for 2004/05 showed that 20% of absence was reported to be related to stress as the most frequent cause of absence. This showed that the figures for Durham correlated with the national trend.

#### **Data about the financial impact of stress related absence**

- 3.29 Members were advised that some Authorities have achieved sickness absence levels below 3.5%, whereas others of the same type of



authority have rates in excess of 5%. It was explained to the Group that a sickness absence rate of 3.5% is the equivalent of an Authority with 8,000 employees having 280 staff off all year. A 5% rate means that the Authority has the equivalent of 400 staff away all year, therefore reducing the absence rate from 5% to 3.5% is the equivalent of adding 120 employees to the staff. This, of course, will have a clear impact on service delivery.

### **Counselling Services**

- 3.30 Providing opportunities to access counselling is an important aspect of supporting employees who may be suffering from work related stress, or stress which may have its roots outside of the workplace.
- 3.31 The Review Group was informed that a number of options are open to County Council employees for counselling via a telephone service (Lancaster LifeAssist). The telephone counselling service can also be accessed by an employee's immediate family. Employees may also be referred to counsellors by Occupational Health. This plays a vital role in assisting employees, by providing a confidential avenue for impartial advice. Some Services also have listening and support staff (i.e. Adult and Community Service and Children and Young People's Service). The Trade Unions also play a key role in supporting staff.
- 3.32 The counsellor's role is to offer support and assistance, discuss the options open to the employee, and help the employee determine if and how, they want to progress matters. Therefore:
- Advice and guidance will be offered in confidence.
  - Information will be given to the individual about the options available to assist the person in making their own decisions.

### **Lancaster Counselling Service**

- 3.33 The Review Group was advised that the current contract with Lancaster was for a further 1½ years through a 2 year contract period. The current contract rate was a reduction on the previous contract with them. The Council has been using Lancaster Counselling Service for approximately 12 years and the call numbers per year fluctuated between 130 - 400 calls. The service was fairly specialised in nature and there were a limited number of companies who provided such services at reasonable cost. It was suggested that take-up of the service would improve if it was of a wider style and provided specialists to deal with specialist problems i.e. legal support lines. The service is a 24/7 service which could not be provided in-house.

- 3.34 The Trade Unions had some concern in relation to the Lancaster service. It was felt that managers were good at promoting the Lancaster service; it was easier to talk face to face than on the telephone. The point was made that sometimes, when Lancaster was contacted, people sometimes needed to wait until a counsellor with a particular specialism was available.

### **The Impact of Counselling**

- 3.35 The Review Group heard that a previous Overview and Scrutiny Working Group which had looked at the issue of sickness absence in Social Care and Health had received evidence about the success of the listening and support services which were provided in-house. Such provision had now been extended to Children and Young People's Service. The question of whether there was a need for a more corporate approach to this type of provision across the Authority was discussed.
- 3.36 The Group was informed that the 'larger Services' are currently providing this level of support/provision. However Occupational Health provides such a service for the remaining departments within the Authority. Occupational Health have access to counselling and psychology services, although it was recognised that, with additional budgetary provision the current service provision provided by Occupational Health could be improved.
- 3.37 Counselling services are provided by Unison and GMB although the services are limited. Unison confirmed that it dealt with many staff who benefited from counselling, especially the long-term sick; adding that in-house face to face counselling was a particular benefit.
- 3.38 It was confirmed that Human Resources had considered a mix of both external and in-house counselling provision but found that most people preferred to use telephone counselling because of its anonymity. The mix of the two types of provision was considered to be ideal but would have cost implications. However this potentially would be outweighed by the reduced levels/costs of stress related sickness absence.
- 3.39 It was agreed that currently there is disparity across the Authority in the provision of counselling. It was highlighted that there is a need for services to be uniformly provided and accessible across the organisation.
- 3.40 Research carried out by Professor McLoud of Dundee University was cited which showed that for the money put into counselling, an organisation receives at least the same amount back in savings. In Social Care and Health, sickness absence had been reduced by 60%

with the introduction of a counselling service and of half the people seen; stress was an issue, with 90% of them having some work element.

- 3.41 Unison advised that it was very important that staff had confidence in any counselling service provided. It had the ability to intervene in the causes of stress. Staff can become very defensive in such situations which can lead to conflict and some authorities had in place a scheme of no blame mediation which was beneficial.

## Section Four - Conclusions and Recommendations

### Introduction

- 4.1 The need to do more to help reduce work related stress has been recognised by the County Council with the introduction of a Stress Management Policy and Toolkit in 2007. As we move towards a new Unitary Authority (with the understandable concerns this raises amongst some staff), it is even more important that this issue assumes a higher priority within the Council.

### Conclusions

- 4.2 Because the Stress Management Policy is still in its early stages, it is difficult to say whether it has been of any use to date in helping to reduce sickness absence levels linked to work related stress. The proposed measure was to compare staff survey data, but there has not been a sufficient time gap to collect and analyse results.
- 4.3 There has already been a review of the Policy, following feedback from managers, to provide them with more guidance as to what they can do to support staff.
- 4.4 In relation to the policy, it is important that, for it to be effective, there is a need for commitment from managers from the top level down to any officer who has a supervisory responsibility for others as well as individual employees taking responsibility for their wellbeing. This extends to looking at the culture of the organisation in relation to issues such as eliminating working long hours, urging staff not to miss lunch breaks and reviewing systems for covering sickness absence to ensure that undue pressure is not placed on colleagues when team members are absent due to sickness.
- 4.5 The new policy and toolkit is promoting an open and supportive culture with managers talking 'openly' to teams and teams reviewing the 'tool kit' and identifying where changes need to be made. The First Line Manager's programme includes a specific half day module of learning devoted to stress management linked to the objective of 'understanding and where applicable applying the main principles of stress management and prevention'.
- 4.6 In relation to corporate actions, a project is underway with the NHS Primary Care Trust to develop a 'Training and Trainers' programme as well as raising awareness with employees through leaflets and health promotional events i.e. healthy eating and fitness and smoking prevention.

- 4.7 During the course of the project the Group was informed that there was a study underway by the Audit Commission in Durham and Teesside which would review sickness management arrangements in Durham County and the Districts as well as Redcar and Cleveland Councils, Hartlepool Borough Council and Stockton Borough Council with the project identifying and sharing areas of good practice, areas of weak practice, common practice which lead to high levels of sickness and establish reasons for disparity. Regrettably, the findings were not available in time for consideration by the Group, but it is felt that they should be formally considered by the Council when received.
- 4.8 The benefits of telephone counselling, as contrasted with in-house counselling and that provided via the Occupational Health Service were considered at length by the Working Group. On the one hand, the Group heard that telephone counselling provides anonymity which some people prefer. Face to face counselling too has particular benefits, especially when the counsellor may be aware of work related issues specific to a particular Service. The Group felt that although the costs of the telephone counselling service were relatively low an evaluation should be carried out of its effectiveness and whether it provides value for money.
- 4.9 The Review Group felt that the existing support and listening service arrangements in Adult and Community Services and Children and Young People's Service were providing a good service. However, the Group felt that these services had developed piecemeal and were of the view that Human Resources needed to play a greater corporate role in relation to this type of provision. It was felt that such services should be offered in-house across **all** Council Services. It was also felt that costs and benefits which development of a mediation service might introduce should be examined.
- 4.10 The Group also felt there was a need to ensure more consistency around how staff survey data is collected and analysed (it was said that some data was collected/analysed at Service level and other data at Team level). In particular there is a need to have accurate data to identify "hotspots" so appropriate action can be taken where necessary.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.11 **The Light Touch Review Scrutiny Working Group makes the following recommendations:**
- (a) **There is a need to regularly review the Stress Management Policy and Toolkit. This should also include awareness raising from time to time amongst the workforce.**

- (b) The findings of the Audit Commission report into sickness absence should be presented to members for consideration when received.**
- (c) An evaluation both of the effectiveness and value for money provided by the Lancaster Counselling Service should be undertaken.**
- (d) The provision of an in-house listening and support service across all Council Services should be investigated by Human Resources Division and a report prepared for consideration by members of the New County Durham Council. The report should include proposals for the strengthened corporate role which Human Resources might undertake in any new arrangements. It should also consider how arrangements for a mediation service (within well-defined boundaries) might be introduced.**
- (e) Consideration should be given by Human Resources as to how Staff Survey data collection and analysis might be improved and, in parallel with sickness absence data, better employed in identifying work related stress hotspots.**

**Councillor J B Walker**

**Chair of the Light Touch Review Group**

---

**Contact: Tom Bolton      Tel: 0191 383 3149**  
**Email:      thomas.bolton@durham.gov.uk**

---

## Appendix

### Children & Young People

Children's Services  
Youth Engagement

Finance & Staffing  
Information & Technology  
Sure Start  
School & Governor Support  
Resources Unit  
Policy & Planning  
ACCESS & Pupil Services  
Learning Support  
Educational Psychology Service

Special Educational Needs  
Educational Development

Musical Support  
Education in the Community  
DB&LP

### Environment

Transport Strategy & Design  
Highways Management  
Trading Standards  
Scientific Services  
Environment & Planning  
Directorate

### Chief Executive's Office

Business & Executive Support  
Corporate Policy  
Economic Dev. & Regeneration  
CS – Design & Print  
CS – Information & Technology

### Adults & Community

Adult Services (MH)  
Adult Services  
(EPD)  
Quality & Performance  
SF&BS  
SP&HI  
Central Support  
Libraries  
Durham Studies  
ICD  
Durham Learning Resources  
Community  
Development/Support

### Corporate Services

Design Services  
Legal Services  
Human Resources  
Property/Estates  
Procurement  
Democratic & Corporate

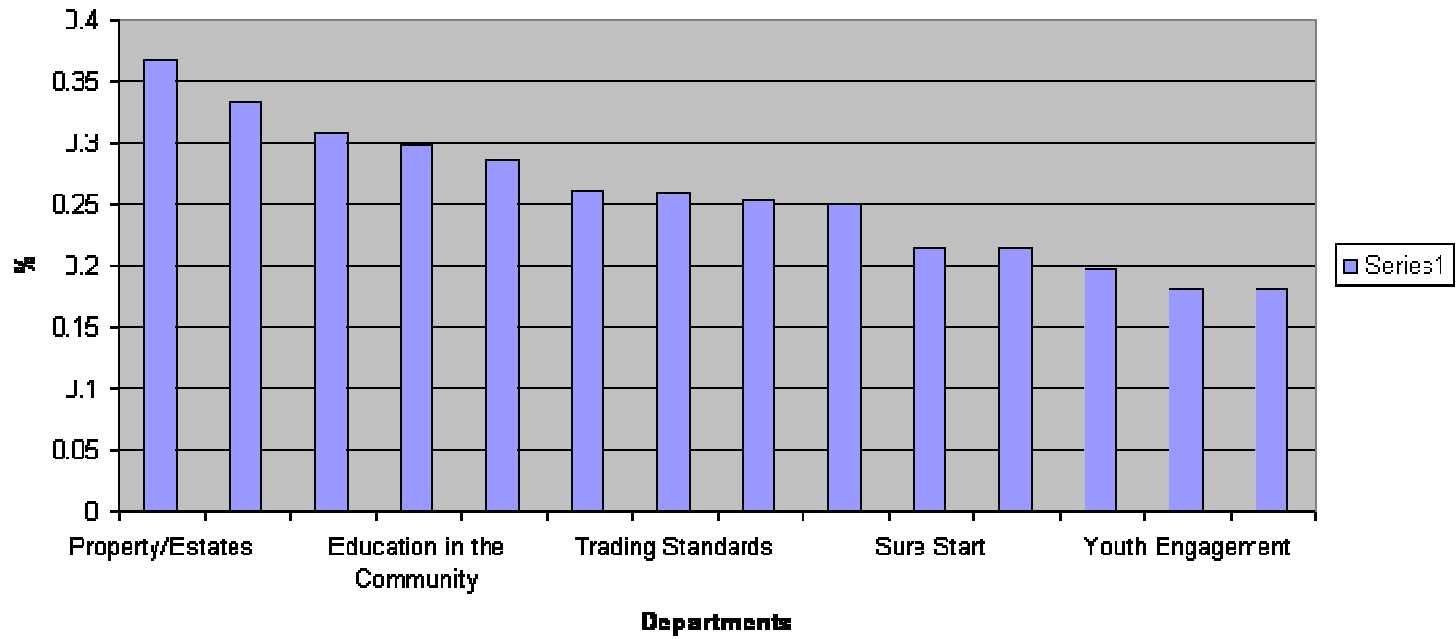
### Treasurers

Financial Management  
Financial Services  
Payroll

Staff Survey Results 2006

Demands

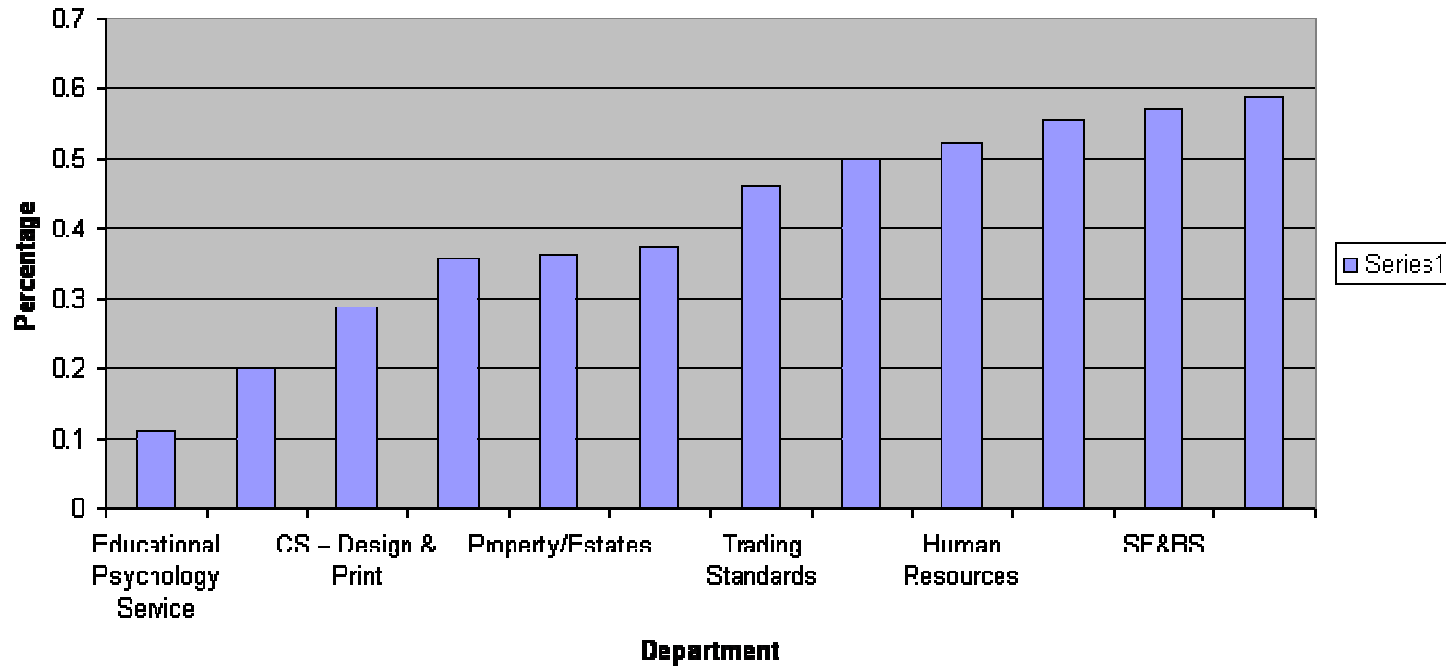
**In the last 12 months have you been injured or felt unwell as a result of work related stress?**



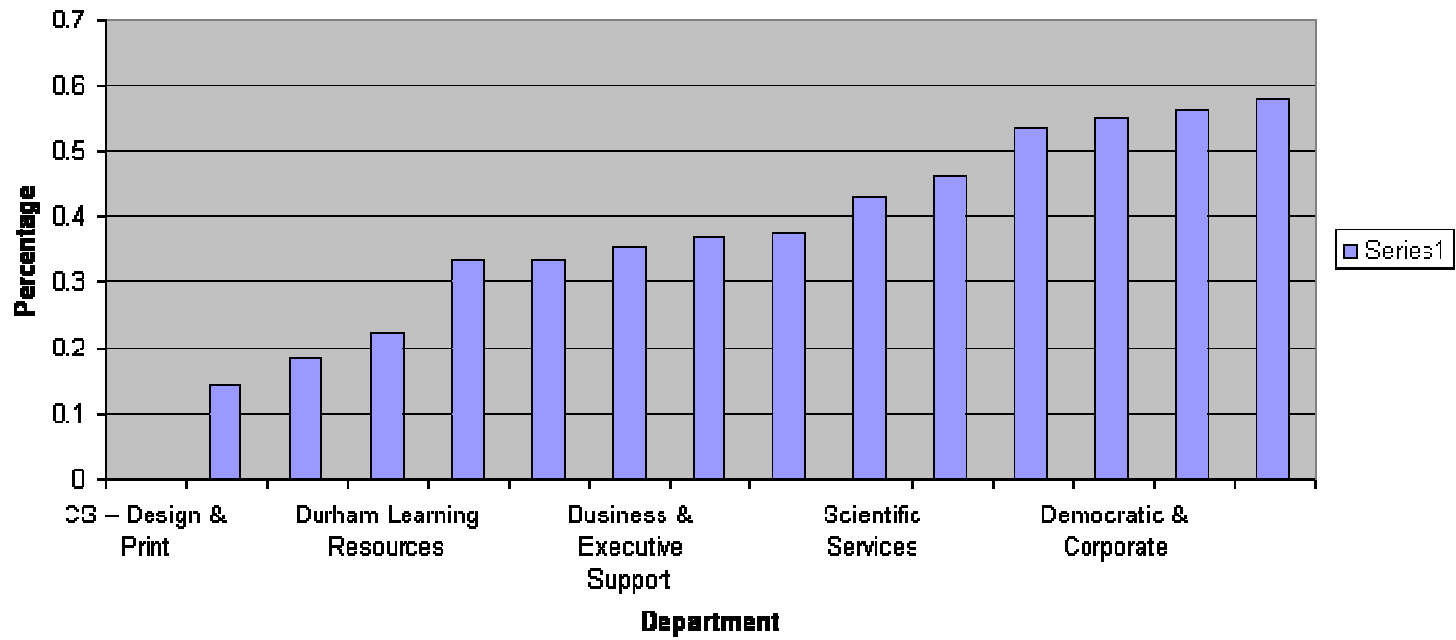


## Support

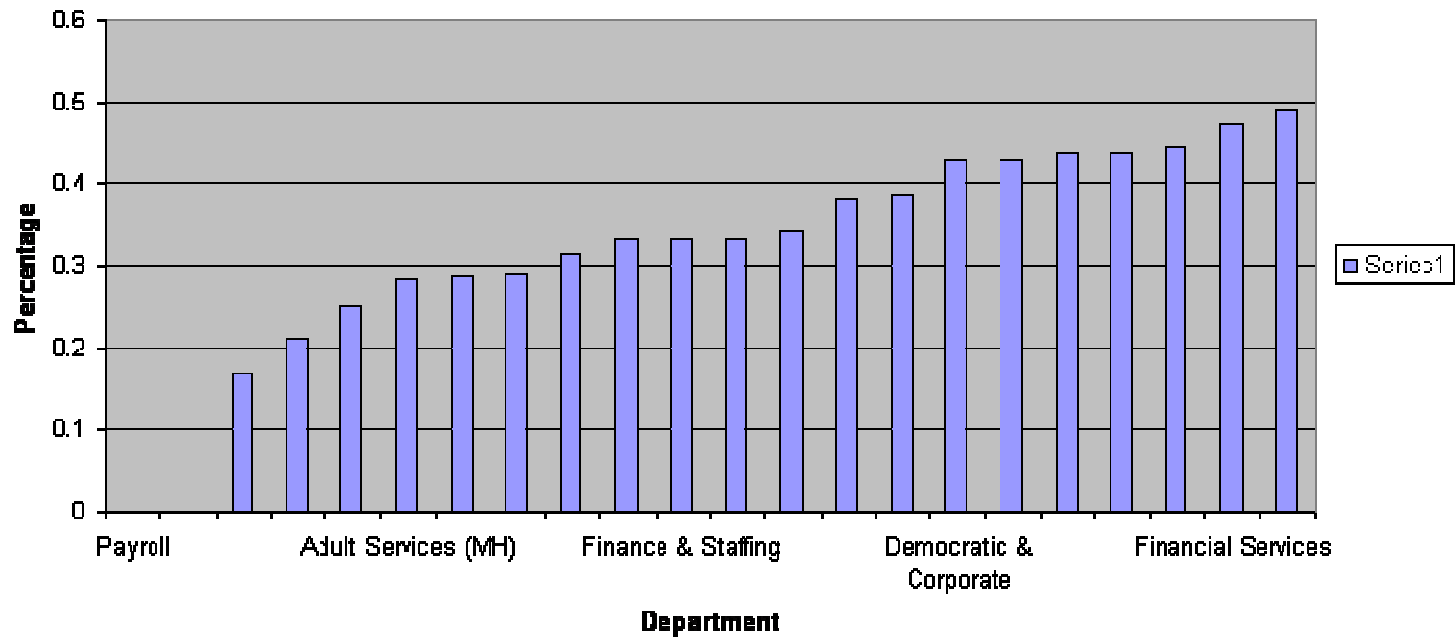
**How satisfied are you that your line manager gives you sufficient leadership and direction?**



**How satisfied are you that your performance appraisal has helped you identify your development needs?**

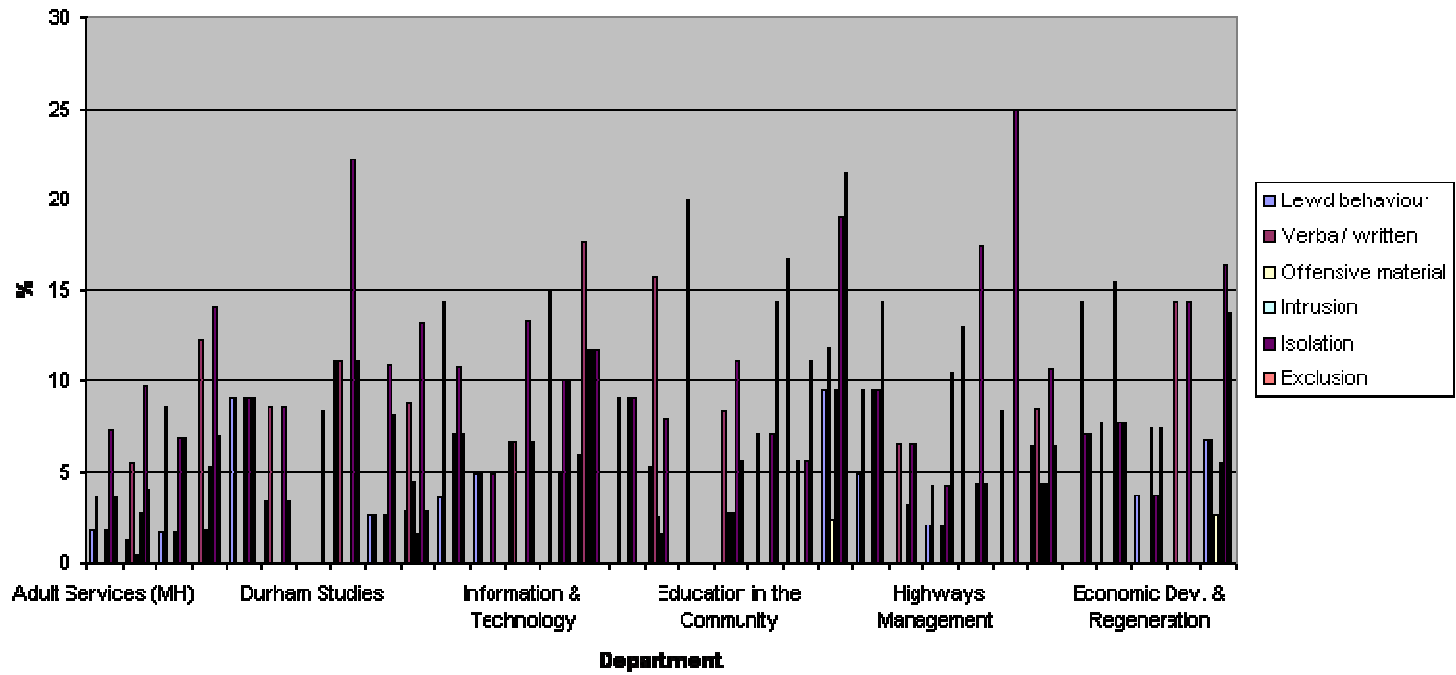


**In the last 12 months did you agree a performance development plan with your line manager?**

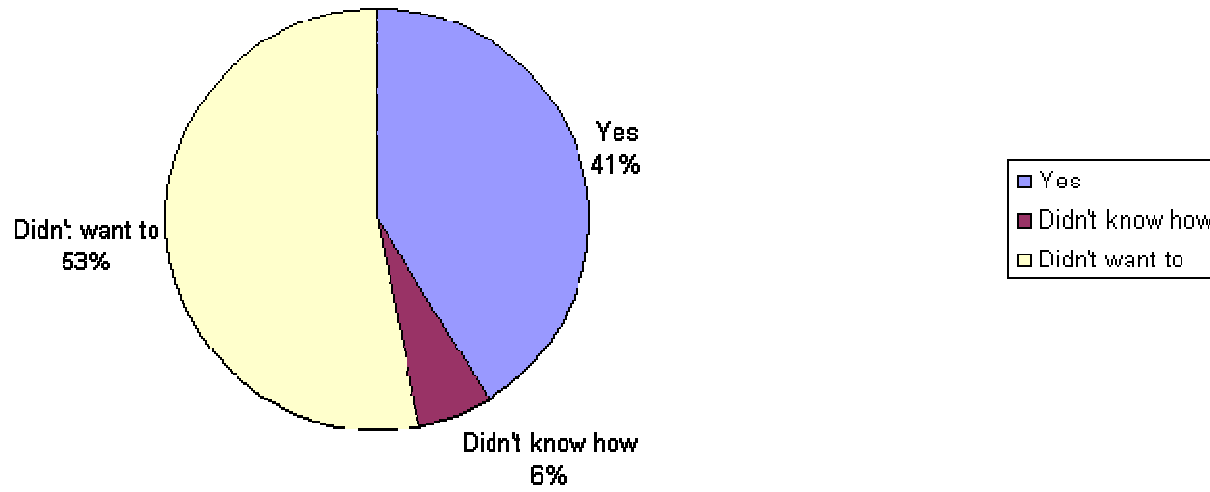


## Relationships

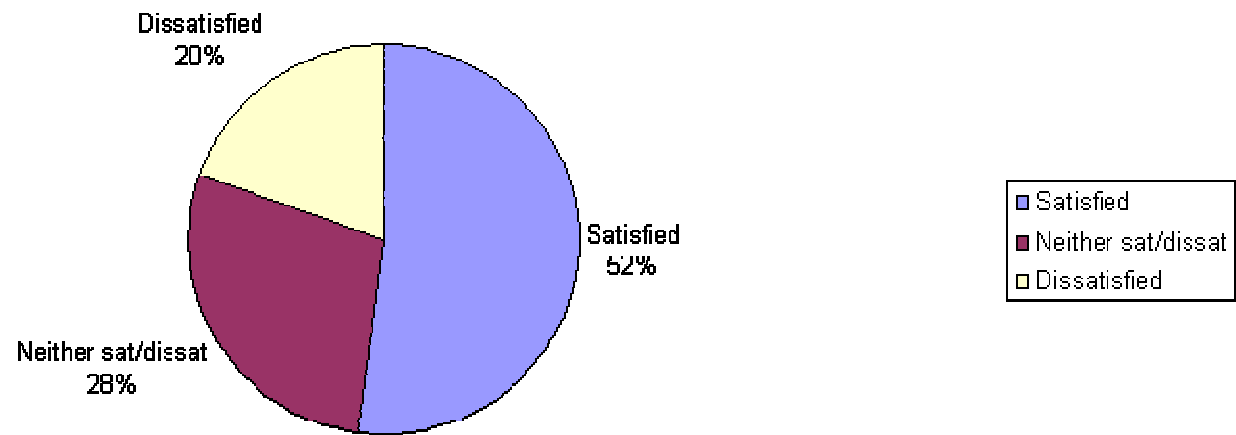
**In the last 12 months have you suffered bullying or harassment from a member of staff:**



**If you suffered bullying or harassment, did you report it?**

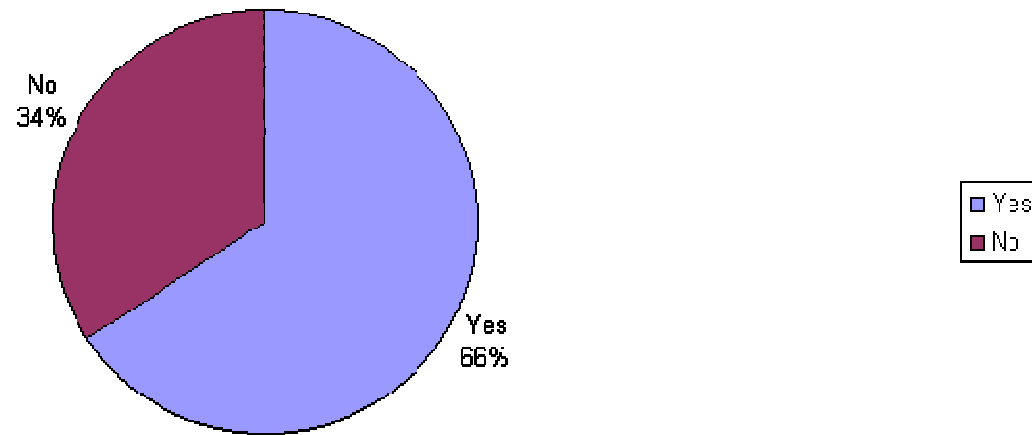


**How satisfied are you that effective action is taken if individuals are discriminated against or harassed?**

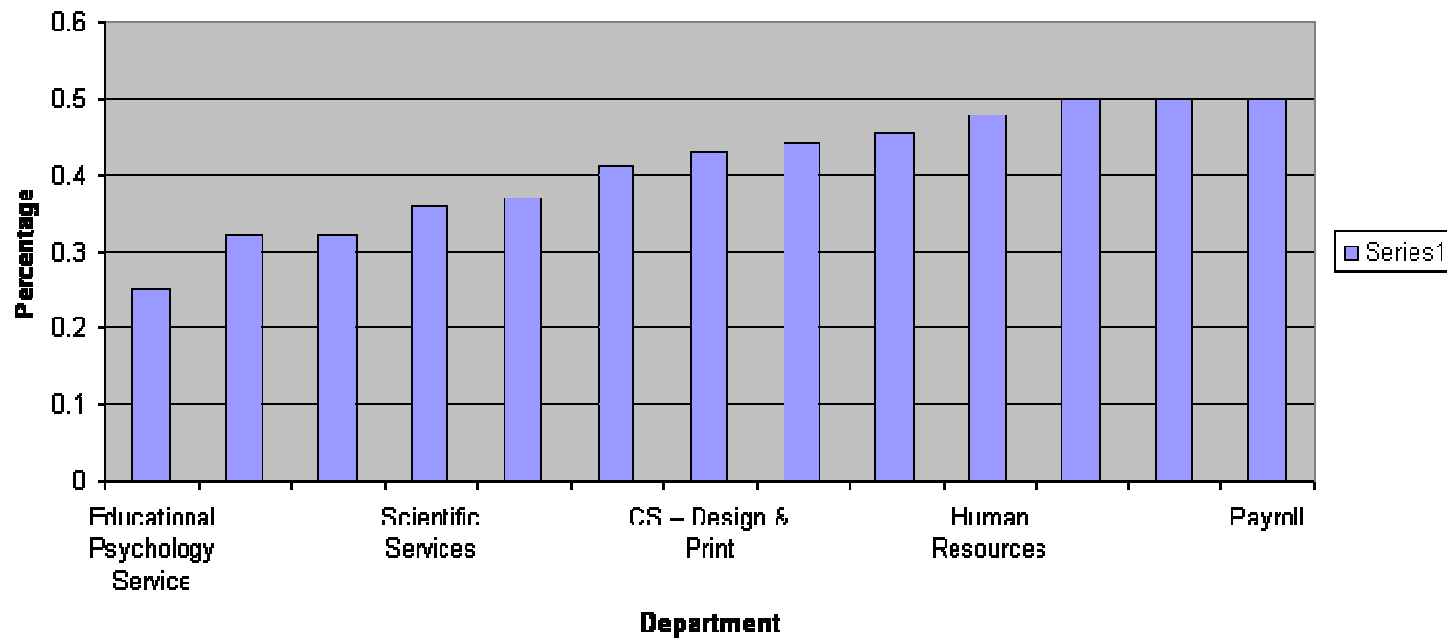


Role

**In the last 12 months have you had a performance appraisal?**



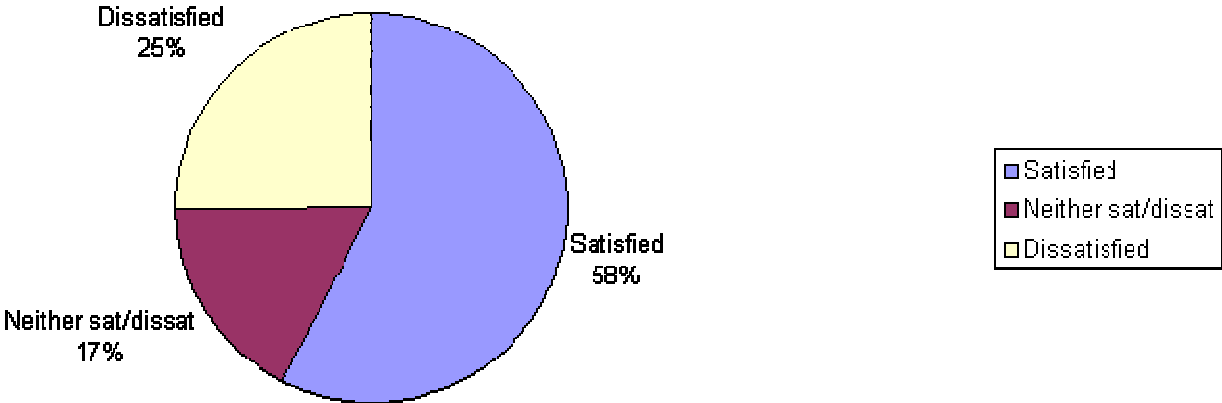
**How satisfied are you that you receive the appropriate feedback/acknowledgement of your work?**





Change

**How satisfied are you that you are kept informed of any changes which affect you?**



**How satisfied are you that communications across the County Council are effective?**

