

Dundalk Town Council Case Study

Background:

Dundalk Town Council employs a total of 255 staff ranging from Indoor Office Based Workers, Outdoor Workers and Firefighters. Dundalk Town Council is one of the four Local Authorities contained within the Louth Local Authorities overall structure. Dundalk Town Council provide many services of an infrastructural and social nature of the people of Dundalk with a population of circa 30,000. Dundalk is listed as a Gateway town in the countries National Spatial Strategy.

Louth Local Authorities conducted a staff satisfaction survey back in 2005 which among the many results received highlighted that a considerable number of Dundalk Town Council employees felt that they were suffering from “Stress in the Workplace”.

Getting Started:

Once “Stress” was identified as a potential problem area for employees of Dundalk Town Council, the Management of Dundalk Town Council was committed and fully supportive of liaising with the Health & Safety Authority to undertake a programme of “Work Positive” over a number of months.

The process was co-ordinated by the Administrative Officer of the Town Clerks Office. Awareness was raised by inviting all staff to attend a session with Ms. Patricia Murray, Organisational Psychologist/Inspector with the HSA who explained the Work Positive process and what would be involved.

Look at the Hazards:

The benchmark was the result of the staff satisfaction survey carried out by Louth Local Authorities in conjunction with the available sickness absence records.

Identify who might be harmed:

It was identified that stress can affect anyone in the Local Authority of Dundalk Town Council.

Evaluate the risk:

All staff within Dundalk Town Council were separated into three groups for the process i.e. Indoor Staff, Outdoor Staff, Firefighters. A letter was sent to every staff member from the HSA through the pay slip system initially, outlining the programme aims

All staff within these three groups were presented with the Work Positive questionnaire in paper format, presented by the HSA to management for dispersing and analysed by them in April of 2006. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get a general, overall impression of the staff at Dundalk Town Council's view of the sources of stress for them at work. This gave the Management of Dundalk Town Council a sense of the sources of stress as staff see them, so that we can move from there, through focus groups and more communication activities to address issues where they arise.

Taking action and developing solutions:

Approximately 150 questionnaires were distributed to all staff by way of attachment to the payslips. This was co-ordinated by the Town Clerks Office. There was a low response rate of less than 50% which was quite disappointing. The returned questionnaires were analysed at the HSA in Dublin. The overall findings from Dundalk indicated that there were issues for many staff around two main issues which were relationships and support. There were a number of different issues identified but for this project Dundalk Town Council decided to look that relationships and support firstly with the Work Positive Project. It was then agreed to put in place training sessions and education days and awareness raising programmes to tackle them. It was then agreed to roll out awareness sessions on Dignity at Work, Positive Approaches to Stress and Time Management. All sessions were delivered by an independent trainer. The sessions were aimed to raise awareness among staff, improve relationships and build behaviours which are positive and supportive within the Council for the benefit of all.

Proposed Actions:

It is now proposed that further sessions are brought on line to tackle more issues identified by the questionnaire such as Bullying/Dignity at Work etc.

Lessons Learned:

Dundalk Town Council has learned that managing workplace stress and stressors is an ongoing facet of the workings of the Human Relations Department. It is acknowledged that where employees report stress as a reason for absence that immediate steps are undertaken to identify the causes, and if work related, to deal with the stressors identified.