

MEETING

**Human Resources & Equalities Panel
Authority**

AGENDA ITEM

4

MEETING DATE

7th, 13th and 21st September 2006

DOCUMENT NUMBER

HRE 215

SUBJECT

Stress Management including the Stress Audit of all Staff

REPORT

(25.08.06) by the Head of Human Resources

Summary

This paper provides an update on the Stress Audit conducted by Robertson Cooper Ltd (a firm of Occupational Psychologists) in November 2005. It also includes the first draft report from Robertson Cooper Ltd which presents detailed analysis of the Audit results; input from their facilitated focus groups and most importantly officers' recommendations for action.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be received.

BACKGROUND

1. The Authority approved a staff wide Stress Audit on 21/07/05. A pilot undertaken in two departments had been carried out in August 2004 by Robertson Cooper Ltd (RC). Knowledge and experience from the pilot was utilised to develop and frame the final audit of all staff.
2. It is clear from the following absence data that across most staff groups, Stress, Anxiety and Depression (SAD) represents a significant amount of the total sickness absence recorded in the organisation. It should be noted that the figure of 19.54% compares to an Employers Organisation 'norm' of 20%. (23.86% for London Boroughs – ALG Survey)

April 05-March 06	Total Sick	Total SAD	SAD % Sick	Days SAD
<i>Uniformed Operational</i>	5.56%	1.09%	19.55%	1.98
<i>Uniformed Non Operational</i>	6.61%	1.78%	27.02%	4.18
<i>MGPO</i>	3.20%	0.61%	19.00%	1.58
<i>Control</i>	6.42%	1.68%	26.11%	3.06
<i>Craft & Manual</i>	6.62%	0.60%	9.04%	1.55

TOTAL	5.23%	1.02%	19.54%	2.04
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In terms of financial implications, based on these percentages, the cost of Stress, Anxiety and Depression to the organisation between April 05 to March 06 was as follows:-

April 05- March 06	Av Cost of Sickness	Av Cost of SAD
<i>Uniformed Operational</i>	£11,255,031.24	£2,200,143.12
<i>Uniformed Non Operational</i>	£270,810.15	£73,174.66
<i>MGPO</i>	£1,124,959.59	£213,743.88
<i>Control</i>	£326,122.55	£85,155.50
<i>Craft & Manual</i>	£148,747.28	£13,439.52
	£13,125,670.81	£2,585,656.68

This does not, of course, include individuals who did not take sick leave but whose performance at work may have been affected by SAD. Current predictions are that 1 in 6 adults in the UK, will become depressed at some point in their lives and at any one time 1 in 20 adults will be experiencing depression¹. There is, therefore, a sound business case for investing in measures to reduce SAD in the organisation. The Stress Management Society² advises organisations to take the following steps, based on HSE guidelines, in order to reduce SAD.

- **Conduct a stress audit** – survey all staff, use data that is held within the organisation such as exit interviews, sickness absence and staff turnover records.
 - **Write a stress policy** - based on findings write a detailed policy that covers stress and mental health policies, and complies with HSE guidelines.
 - **Train Staff** – offer organisation wide training to all employees so that they can utilise stress – management techniques in their day-to-day jobs. Also this helps managers to understand the new stress policy and not only know how to manage their own stress but also recognise symptoms in colleagues and react appropriately.
 - **Get Support** – ensure that stress-management products are made available to support the organisation's stress policy - e.g. relaxation pods, stress dots, on-site head massage.
3. It is proposed that, from the organisational action plan and outcomes arising from this work and detailed later in this paper, a reduction target of 5% for each of the three years following the introduction of the action plan be accepted.

April 05-March 06	SAD 05/06	Target 06/07	Target 07/08	Target 08/09
<i>Uniformed Operational</i>	1.09%	1.04%	0.98%	0.93%
<i>Uniformed Non Operational</i>	1.78%	1.69%	1.60%	1.51%

¹ Figures provided by the Mental Health charity SANE.

² <http://stress.org.uk/>

<i>MGPO</i>	0.61%	0.58%	0.55%	0.52%
<i>Control</i>	1.68%	1.60%	1.51%	1.43%
<i>Craft & Manual</i>	0.60%	0.57%	0.54%	0.51%
TOTAL	1.02%	0.97%	0.92%	0.87%

4. The objectives of the Audit were as follows:-

- a. To compare the perceived stress levels in the London Fire Brigade with those experienced in the general working population
- b. To accurately understand the nature, location and severity of sources of stress within the Brigade (Hot Spots) and to identify where staff perceptions are positive and motivation is good
- c. To link the outcome with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 6 Management Standards on the management of stress
- d. To provide the Authority with an opportunity to introduce proactive and reactive initiatives that directly target identified 'Hot Spots'
- e. To enable the Authority to use its' baseline data to develop interventions which would assist in stress absence being reduced and enable HSE standards³ to improve over time.
- f. Due to the fact the ASSET questionnaire is based around the HSE standards it would be prudent to run the stress audit again in 3 years time to enable the organisation to show objectively how the Authority has improved.

STRESS AUDIT – ALL STAFF

5. The Stress Audit was issued to all staff on 24/11/05 following preparatory work with Robertson Cooper Ltd. Staff were allowed three weeks to complete the audit and return it directly to Robertson Cooper Ltd. There was a mix of paper and electronic returns.
6. It should be noted from the outset that the Audit provides information on individual perceptions. Stress relates to an imbalance between the demands of a situation and an individual's ability to cope with them. A situation that one individual finds stressful will

The HSE Standards are:-

- ³ **Demands** - such as workload, work patterns and the work environment
- **Control** - such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work
- **Support** - such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
- **Relationships** - such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** - such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
- **Change** - such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation
-

not necessarily be experienced in the same way by another. However, the audit highlights the most common perceptions and therefore where it is a frequent experience for the demands of a situation to outweigh individual's coping strategies. The most common pressures will be highlighted as 'hot spots'.

7. It should also be noted that there will always be a time delay between changes being implemented and that impacting on perceptions. For example, a number of initiatives such as team building which commenced in the Autumn of 2005 would have occurred too late to impact on the results.
8. A response rate of 38% was achieved, which Robertson Cooper Ltd advise, is a reasonable rate comparing favourably with that achieved in many Public Sector organisations.
9. The breakdown shows that, in total, 7202 questionnaires were issued of which 2712 were returned. Of these, 2137 were sent out electronically (with 1377 [64%] returned). 5065 paper copies were issued with 1335[26%] returned. 51% of the data is therefore taken from electronic copies and 49% from paper.

AREAS MEASURED

10. The Audit questionnaire was based on the Robertson Cooper Ltd ASSET model of stress which focuses on a number of areas found to correlate with workplace stress. The areas measured were:-
 - a. Responses to sources of pressure at work, including workload, working relationships and work-life balance;
 - b. Organisational commitment - how committed staff feel towards the organisation and how committed they feel the organisation is to them;
 - c. Health perceptions – physical health and psychological well-being;

FOCUS GROUPS

11. Following on from the questionnaire, individuals across the organisation were invited to attend a focus group facilitated by Robertson Cooper Ltd. The groups ran on the 15th/ 16th May and attendees were asked to discuss openly what factors they believed were responsible for the outcomes. A core objective of the focus groups was to develop practical solutions to help reduce workplace stress. The groups were organised in the following way:-
 - a. Fire-fighters
 - b. Uniformed Middle Managers – Station Based
 - c. Uniformed Middle Managers – Non-Station Based
 - d. Uniformed Senior Managers
 - e. Junior MGPO
 - f. Senior MGPO

ROBERTSON-COOPER FINAL REPORT

12. Robertson-Cooper's final report on the stress audit is attached at Appendix 3. It should be noted that this report was sent to the Authority on 26 May 2006 and an interim report provided to CCG on 2 June 2006. It was agreed at CCG that more detailed work should be conducted with a further report to HRE&HS Panel.
13. HR has also facilitated a number of focus groups in addition to those carried out by Robertosn Cooper, subsequent to the provision of their report. These focus group took place between 9th June and 13th July involving approxiamtely 40 starff from all grades and occupatioanl groups. Those sessions brodayly supported the outcoems expressed in the Robertosn Cooper Report. Theses sions have been followed up with the departmental briefings that commenced towards the end of July and were concluded by w/c 21st August.

KEY RESULTS

14. The key findings are as follows:-
 - a. In terms of risk to both physical and psychological health, LFEPA's performance was in line with the normal working population.
 - b. Employees reported no adverse impact from work life balance and working relationships.
 - c. Employees were motivated by working for an emergency service directly engaged in public safety.
 - d. Identified stress hot spots such as job security, amount of control, resources and communication, pay and benefits – all relate to an organisation undergoing major change.

The audit also highlighted a view that staff felt the organisation was substantially less committed to them than they to it after five years of service or more.

These results were communicated to staff via the 'Hot Talk' process and also in the IB.

ACTION PLAN

15. The Robertson-Cooper report includes an action plan covering several key areas, some of which are extremely broad in scope. These cover change management; training; line management capability; communication; and more general work and life-style issues.
16. However, and as highlighted at para 5, the audit took place in November 2005 and initiatives that were introduced in close proximity (before or after) this date will not have been reflected in the survey results. Many of the areas highlighted within the Robertson Cooper report are therefore already being addressed, wholly or in part, by existing change programmes within the Authority e.g. the Hot Talk programme. Officers have therefore developed a more detailed Action Plan, taking into account these initiatives and feedback from the focus groups, together with details of actions already taken.
17. The proposed action plan is detailed at Appendix 1, with actions cross-referenced to Robertson-Cooper recommendations. It should be noted that , for a number of these actions, there is currently no budget for further development and implementation.

NEXT STAGES

18. In order that the underlying issues emerging from the audit are addressed, the action plan comprises a range of short, mid and longer term initiatives. It is envisaged that the programme be completed over a three-year period, with annual reviews to gauge progress.

19. It should be noted that this phased approach has been successfully adopted by Somerset County Council (SCC), where officers have recently conducted a site visit. Although SCC are not a directly comparable organisation to LFEPA, they have faced some significant stress related issues with specific groups of staff (e.g. Social Workers). Following similar work with Robertson-Cooper, they have developed a successful action plan which has been held up as a beacon of excellence in this area, with a case study featured on the HSE website.

20. It is proposed that a Cross Organisational Steering Group be established to take forward the action plan and commission any further work/ analysis arising from the audit that is required. It will also be important for this group to ensure that an integrated approach is taken involving key stakeholders.

21. In parallel, Departmental Heads have received an in-depth feedback report and briefing, reviewing audit outcomes for their area. Following on from this all departments will be offered the opportunity to have a further facilitated focus group aimed at more detailed discussions around outcomes. Department Heads will be supported in developing local action plans and it is proposed that the implementation of Department action plans be overseen by the Cross Organisational Steering Group.

22. The proposed Cross Organisational Steering Group will ensure that actions and proposed initiatives are communicated with Heads of Departments and that update reports are provided to Members as appropriate.

23. An approach that has been particularly successful in SCC has been linking all the associated initiatives together under a single 'brand' or 'identity'. This can not only raise awareness of specific initiatives and improve commitment from employees, but can also emphasize commitment from the organisation. It is proposed therefore that the Authority takes a similar approach, developing the 'Quality of Working Life' identity as part of the action plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

24. Members will see that the attached Action Plan includes proposals for stress reduction programmes which have budgetary implications. A bid for £50k in respect of these is being put forward as part of the 2007/08 budget process.

APPENDIX 1 - DRAFT ACTION PLAN

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<p>1. Communicate the results of this audit openly with all staff, including the management response to its findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of information about what is going on in the organisation. • Staff feeling the organisation is less committed to them than they to it. <p>Consider communication initiatives for closing the perceived gap between senior management and station level management / fire-fighters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of involvement in decision 	<p>1a. Make breakdown of generic results available to all staff via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bespoke leaflets and Hotwire • to include an acknowledgment of results being of some concern to the organisation. • to include action plan • link to other processes / outcomes e.g. roundtable on risk <p>1b. Departmental Heads to communicate key outcomes specific to their departments via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face-to-face briefings using Hot Talk • Use of HR and LSP2 facilitators to support managers/departments requiring extra assistance • feedback sessions to be used to inform the departmental action plans. <p>1c. Produce a leaflet with generic stress management advice-to be circulated in conjunction with Hot Talk briefings</p> <p>1d. Managers to feedback content of the departmental action plans to staff, after reporting back to the Steering Group.</p> <p>1e. Continue borough cmdr / member / director level station visits. Increase awareness of these, through the increased formalisation of them, publishing on hotwire dates and key outcomes of these meetings.</p> <p>1f. Department Action plans to include ways in which</p>	<p>September / October 2006</p> <p>October/ November 2006</p> <p>October/November 2006</p> <p>Early 2007</p>

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<p>making and account not being taken of ideas / suggestions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of information about what is going on in the organisation. • Staff feeling the organisation is less to committed to them than they to it. 	<p>communication regarding change / vision can be tailored to each specific level within the organisation, with specific actions to 'narrow the gap'.</p> <p>And renumber the rest</p> <p>1g. New improved IB can include more 'Day in the Life of...' features</p> <p>1h. The introduction of PRDS will directly link corporate plans to individual objectives</p> <p>1i. Ensure regular 'Face-to-Face' communication from Area / Borough managers with all station based personnel.</p>	
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Hot Talk Team Briefing Process – introduced across the Authority in November 2005 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hot Talk is a vehicle which allows the organisation to communicate key issues such as stress audit outcomes. Not only can it be used to communicate the details of the stress audit process, but it is also is linked to audit outcomes associated with communication. • Survey results posted on Hotwire in January 2006 improving 		

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results briefed as part of Hot Talk2 May 2006 • Station Visits – a programme of regular visits by Directors / ACs to Fire Stations is currently in place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These visits are designed to encourage a two-way communication between senior managers and staff. Clear vision from Directors / ACs on how and why the organisation is changing is the driver for this process. • Regular CMB / Manager contact – CMB regularly meet directly with Assistant Commissioners and Heads of Service and also with Area and Group Managers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication of all key strategic changes are passed on directly to Principal Managers in the organisation. 		
<p>2. Review change programmes and initiatives, current and planned, and communicate a clear vision of how it will feel to work for London Fire in the short to medium term. Be as clear and open as possible about service led behaviours expected of staff and the difficulties and problems that must be overcome to ensure the vision is realized effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of information about what is going on in the organisation. • Staff feeling the organisation is less committed to them than they to it. • <i>*Note: the introduction of a Staff Charter</i> 	<p>2a. CMB to consider whether further interactions between strategic level managers and the wider workforce are needed.</p> <p>2b. Work with representative groups across the organisation to identify behaviours/expectations between the organisation and staff. <i>*Consider how this can be applied to a 'Staff Charter'.</i></p> <p>The Charter would outline what standards of behaviour are expected within the organisation for all staff. For example in the area of 'Work-Life Balance' the following could be included – "We can help colleagues experiencing workplace stress by encouraging them to talk and take appropriate action."</p> <p>2c. Introduce a programme of 'Staff Engagement' that builds the organisational skills needed by managers for engaging with staff, basis communication, line manager capability etc.</p>	<p>Early 2007</p>

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<p><i>had been particularly successful in SCC.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job security – Perceived fear of future job change. 	<p>2d. Following the completion of the departmental action plans, Dept. Heads and Steering Group to review how communication regarding change/vision can be tailored to specific levels within the organisation.</p> <p>2e. Full report to be posted on Hotwire</p> <p>2f. Continue IRMP style consultations with workforce on key changes</p> <p>2g. The introduction of PQA based performance appraisal and development (PRDS)</p>	<p>October 2007</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>October 2006</p>
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Hot Talk Team Briefing Process – introduced across the Authority in November 2005 IRMP Briefing sessions with staff 		
<p>3. Review current training provision and standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived lack of incident based training to conduct the fire-fighter role. 	<p>3a. Publicise T & D Strategy</p> <p>3b. Review with T&D marketing strategies and approaches for the training courses available to all staff.</p> <p>3c. Undertake an analysis of the skills gap in terms of management training and capability in the organisation. Consider the implications for management and core training.</p>	<p>TBA by T&D</p>

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
	3d. Review impact of DAMOP.	October 2006
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAMOP (Developing and Maintaining Operational Professionalism) – new training policy and guidance note designed specifically for station based training covering risk critical training and frequency of training at station level. • Further developments to ensure that individuals on station are appropriately trained e.g. introduction of individual training records; station diaries • Communications strategy has been drafted and work is already taking place to update the 'developing our people' website and the course portfolio. Training Advisors will be available with the new portfolio to assist line managers to deal with identified training needs. TNA form has been revamped and all staff will be supported by the Training Advisors. Core skills management training is already in place for uniformed staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support is to be offered to all staff via the intranet, to ensure that managers have the correct tools to ensure training needs are identified at an early stage. Review CM /WM ongoing input. • Performance / Appraisal, Development Review System – pilot completed and to be rolled out from Autumn 2006. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff will be regularly appraised to ensure that performance issues are identified and appropriate training can be delivered accordingly. 		
<p>4. Ensure senior and middle managers are trained in change management skills.</p> <p>Perceived lack of training to do the job</p>	<p>4a. Work with the Fire College to best utilise the transformational leadership competencies.</p> <p>4b. Review how change Management in is reflected in middle and strategic management training.</p>	<p>To be agreed by T&D</p> <p>To be agreed by T&D</p>

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Strategic Management Assessment Centres (2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on change management and being a change agent has already been introduced into a number of assessment centres at the senior level. • Fast Track & Mentoring – mentoring pilot completed and under evaluation. Targeted Development pilot commenced in April 2006. 		
<p>5. Consider initiatives to improve communication and role awareness between HQ and fire stations and across departments / directorates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived lack of information about what is going on in the organisation 	<p>5a. New improved IB can include more 'Day in the Life of...' features.</p> <p>5b. Include station visits as part of MG inductions. Open visits up to all existing staff also. Also offer to new Ff trainees and existing uniformed staff in terms of visits to Headquarters complex. Pending the review of the policies on Induction.</p> <p>5c. Consider an organisation wide shadowing scheme.</p> <p>5d. Consider such initiatives as introduce breakfast briefing groups between stations to enhance communication, Action Learning and cross organisational working.</p> <p>5e. Top 20 breakfast briefings for Senior Managers</p>	<p>October 2006</p> <p>Early 2007</p> <p>Early 2007</p> <p>Early 2007</p> <p>Scheduled for 2007</p>
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p>		

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Top 400 Session – a day long event for top 400 managers, involving CMB presenting information on current issues / organisational changes within the organisation now occurs annually. These sessions have given different staff groups the opportunity to informed about current issues / organisational changes and also to communicate with other managers from across the organisation. 		
<p>6. Develop and target Personal Resilience Training at groups with poor health scores from the survey. The training should cover aspects such as Working Smarter, Thinking positively (using Cognitive-Behavioural techniques) and Lifestyle Management. Evaluate the impact on stress levels.</p>	<p>6a. Review what training programmes would be most suitable. Choose appropriate courses to offer to target groups (e.g. Group & Station Managers, staff from Ops Planning). Review the option of including a course specifically on Coping Skills.</p> <p>6b. Promote services of Welfare & Counselling.</p> <p>6c. Consider healthy working lives promotion/Initiatives which are in-line with the Governments 2004 white paper on 'securing Good health for the whole population e.g. seminars on healthy eating, email alerts etc</p> <p>6d. Create a brand image for all issues covered in this area under the banner of 'Quality of Working Lives' so that it is firmly established and easily recognisable within the organisation.</p> <p>6e. Ensure that all departments have annual team events away from their normal working environments.</p> <p>6f. Ensure that all departments introduce a newsletter outlining all key events / projects for their area.</p> <p>6g. Department action plans to be produced in the light of specific Departmental results</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>November 2006</p>

Recommendation	Action / Methodology	Timescales
	6h. Introduction of PRDS where individuals will have regular 1:1s with line managers to discuss all issues affecting performance	
<p>Actions taken to date in this area:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work / Life Balance – a range of initiatives were introduced in April 2006 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This initiative should already be helping employees manage the relationship between work and home in a more effective way and therefore assist with building personal resilience. ○ Clear, regular and up-to-date communication regarding meetings on changes to shift patterns has occurred with all staff via email and the IB. • ACS in place to provide assistance to individuals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counselling services are available to all staff within the organisation if they are struggling to cope either at home or in work. • Stress related absence referred to OHS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any individuals with stress problems are automatically referred to Occupational Health where they have the opportunity to discuss their issues and seek further assistance if necessary. • Equalities provide specific support to under-represented groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Under-represented groups within the organisation are provided with additional support via the Equalities unit within the organisation. 		

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**List of background documents**

List the documents here: Covering report. Robertson Cooper Audit Results Report.

Proper Officer:	James Dagleish
Contact Officer:	Helen Bartimote 020 7587 2000 ext 1282 e-mail: helen.bartimote@london-fire.gov.uk

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – LFEPA Publication Scheme

This document appears in the publication scheme under:	Category:	Policy & Strategy
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	Class:	

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	Topic:	
	Class:	

Information Access Team Contact:	infoaccess@london-fire.gov.uk 020 7587 6275
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robertson cooper limited

London Fire Brigade

Stress (ASSET) Audit

November 2005

Draft Report

Gordon Tinline and Susannah Robertson

25th May 2006

Williams House
Manchester Science Park
Lloyd Street North
MANCHESTER
M15 6SE

Liberty House
222 Regent Street
LONDON
W1B 5TR

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1. ASSET Survey Results Overview

ASSET is a short, valid and reliable stress-screening survey mainly used in risk assessment and staff well-being audit work. The development and validation of ASSET was led by Professor Cary Cooper.

The ASSET survey was available to all staff within London Fire Brigade (the Brigade) to complete (n=7,202), either online or in paper and pencil format, during November 2005. The survey was completed by 2712 respondents in total, a response rate of 38%. The response to the electronic survey was greater (1377/2137=64%) than the paper and pencil response rate (1335/5065=26%).

The overall response rate is reasonable relative to that generally achieved in other ASSET audits and is better than that achieved in many surveys conducted in organisations. The response rate is also acceptable in terms of generalising the findings across the Brigade. Of those that responded to the ASSET audit, 49% were from Service Delivery and 31% were Firefighters, 83.1% were male, 77% were white-British and 97% reported working full-time.

The survey was conducted at a time when London Fire Brigade was in the midst of, or was experiencing the impact of, substantial change and transition. Key events and changes likely to be reflected in staff perceptions and feelings at the time of the survey include recent industrial action, the closure of Manchester Square, and role changes.

The ASSET survey measures the following:

- Response to sources of pressure at work, including workload, working relationships and work-life balance;
- Organisational commitment;
- Health perceptions

The results from staff respondents at London Fire Brigade have been compared to the ASSET General working population norm group of over 25,000 responses. A 1 to 10 (Sten) score is produced for each ASSET measurement scale, where a score in the range 4 to 7 indicates a response (e.g. to workload) that is typical of most others in the comparison group. A more extreme score (1 to 3 or 8 to 10) indicates that staff at London Fire Brigade have responded in a way that is not typical (e.g. more or less stressed by working relationships) of the comparison group.

1.1 Sources of Pressure

Figure 1.1 below shows the sources of pressure scores for respondents from London Fire Brigade in comparison to the general working population. The higher the score, the greater the area¹ is considered to be a source of pressure. Figure 1.1 indicates that staff from London Fire Brigade report Job security (sten 9), Control (sten 10), Resources and communication (sten 9) and Pay and benefits (sten 8) to be sources of pressure to a greater extent than is typical in the general working population. In

¹ The scales in ASSET are described in Appendix A.

terms of Control, lack of involvement in decision making (sten 10) and account not being taken of ideas and suggestions (sten 10) were the key issues highlighted by staff. Lack of information about what is going on in the organisation (sten 8) and lack of training to do the job (sten 8) were the key aspects of Resources and communication that were identified as causes for concern.

Future job change (sten 9) and fear of skill redundancy (sten 8) were the key aspects of Job security that were highlighted to be troubling staff. Related to this, the organisation changing for changes sake was also identified (sten 10) as a major source of pressure.

Work relationships were reported to be particularly positive and a therefore a likely source of support for staff within London Fire Brigade. Overload was not reported to be a great cause for concern except at managerial level, e.g. Area Manager, Group Manager, Station Manager, Watch Manager, Crew Manager (all sten 10).

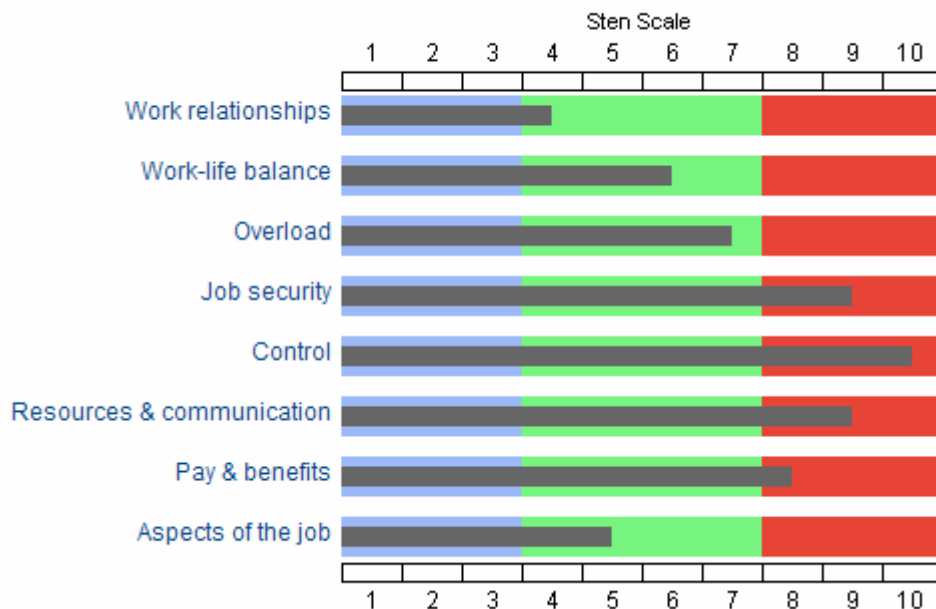
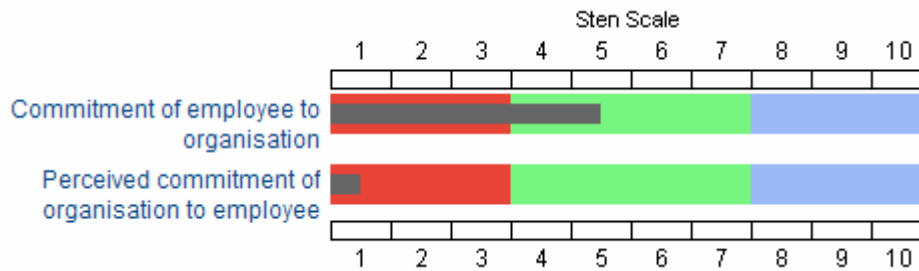


Figure 1.1 Sources of Pressure (General Working Population comparison)

1.2 Organisational Commitment

Two aspects of organisational commitment are assessed by ASSET. The first is how committed staff feel towards the organisation and the second is how committed they feel the organisation is towards them. The higher the score on these scales, the greater the expressed level of commitment.

Figure 1.2 shows the organisational commitment levels in comparison to the general working population.



**Figure 1.2 Organisational Commitment
(General Working Population comparison)**

These results demonstrate average levels of commitment towards the organisation from London Fire Brigade staff. However, the perception of commitment back from the organisation is considerably lower (sten 1). This is a common pattern observed in the public sector, but the size of the discrepancy between the two aspects of commitment certainly represents a challenge in this instance. Recent research shows significant links between strong perceptions of commitment from the organisation and high productivity levels². This reinforces the importance of addressing low perceptions of commitment from the organisation in order to improve overall organisational effectiveness and performance. The particularly poor aspects of organisational commitment reported in the ASSET survey were:

- Employees feeling valued and trusted by the organisation (sten 1)
- Generally employees are happy with the organisation (sten1)

Despite these low scores, employees still report strong levels of commitment to the organisation (item level=sten 7).

A clear trend by length of service is evident in relation to organisational commitment (see figures 1.3 and 1.4 below). Those relatively new in service (i.e. fewer than 2 years in) report strong levels of commitment both to and from the organisation. This commitment drops off sharply once six or more years service is reached, indicating an erosion of commitment over time. Again this is a common finding within the public sector but still represents a management challenge for London Fire Brigade, particularly as the staff profile is a long service one.

² Donald, I., Taylor, P., Johnson, S., Cooper, C., Cartwright, S. & Robertson, S. (In press). Work environments, stress and productivity: An examination using ASSET. International Journal of Stress Management

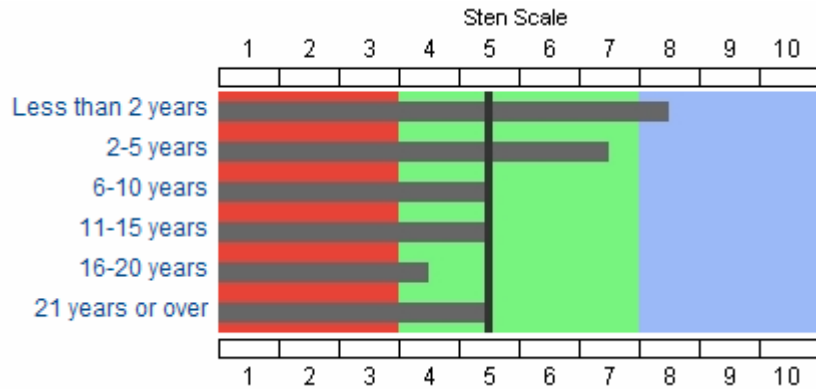


Figure 1.3 Commitment of employee to the organisation, by length of service

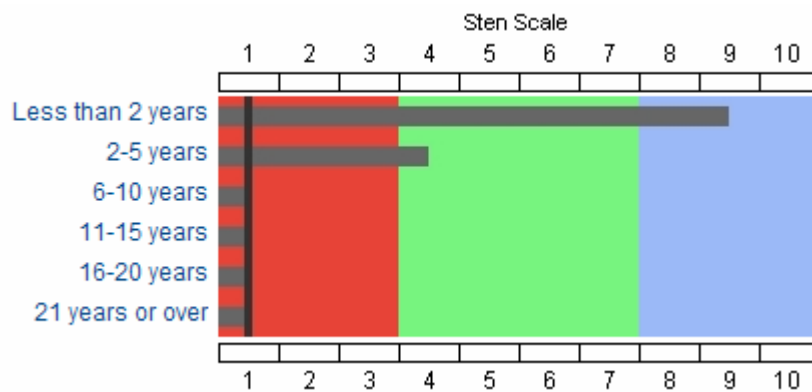


Figure 1.4 Perceived commitment of the organisation, by length of service

1.3 Health

ASSET measures perceived health on two scales: Physical Health and Psychological Well-being. The higher the score on these scales, the higher the perceived risk to health, or the poorer the perceived health.

Figure 1.5 below shows risks to health in comparison to the general working population.

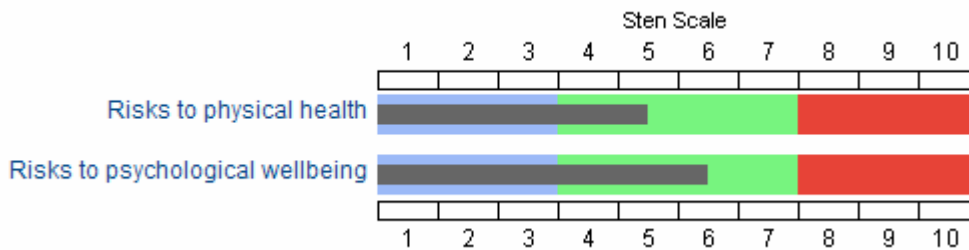


Figure 1.5 Risks to Health (General Working Population comparison)

The above results indicate that risks to health in London Fire Brigade respondents are typical of levels found in the general working population. This suggests that any sources of pressure experienced are currently not having a negative impact on health

across the board. There were some specific aspects of physical health and psychological well-being that were identified as causes for concern by respondents, as follows:

- Muscular tensions / aches and pains (sten 8)
- Constant irritability (sten 8)
- Feeling or becoming angry with others too easily (sten 8)
- Having difficulty concentrating (sten 8)

2. Stress Hot Spots

The data from London Fire Brigade respondents were analysed to determine whether any particular sub-groups expressed significantly higher levels of stress than was typical of most (using general working population comparison group). The following trends are worth highlighting:

Department

The following Departments were identified as stress hotspots:

- ❑ Staff from Communications (n=18) expressed particularly high levels of concern about Overload, Job security, Control, Pay and benefits, Physical health and Psychological well-being.
- ❑ Respondents from Ops Planning (n=67) reported the following issues: Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits, Low perceived commitment of organisation to employee and poor Psychological well-being
- ❑ Staff from Ops Response (not inc Control) (n=379) reported Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits and Low perceived commitment of organisation to employee to be particular areas of concern
- ❑ Respondents in Service Delivery (inc all fire stations & Borough teams) (n=1330) expressed strong concern about Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits and Perceived commitment of organisation to employee

Grade / Role

Respondents from the following Grades / Roles reported concern across a number of the ASSET scales. Any Grades / Roles not indicated here did not express strong concern across a number of the scales and are therefore not highlighted as a hotspot group.

- ❑ Group Manager (N=86): Work life balance, Overload, Control, Resources & communication, Psychological well-being
- ❑ Station Manager (N=168): Work life balance, Overload, Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Perceived commitment of organisation to employee, Psychological well-being
- ❑ Watch Manager (N=471): Overload, Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits, Perceived commitment of organisation to employee
- ❑ Crew Manager (N=287): Overload, Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits, Commitment of employee to organisation, Perceived commitment of organisation to employee
- ❑ Firefighter (N=837): Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits, Perceived commitment of organisation to employee
- ❑ Sub/Station Officer non operational (N=28): Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits

- Firefighter/Leading Firefighter non operational (N=46): Job security, Control, Resources & communication, Pay & benefits, Aspects of the job, Perceived commitment of organisation to employee, Physical health

The results were considerably poorer across the board for Uniformed staff (n=2035) relative to Non-uniformed staff (n=659), particularly around Job security, Control and Resources and Communication (all sten 10). In addition it was generally Uniformed males (n=1919) that expressed the highest stress levels.

In terms of length of service, a clear trend was observed - poorer results were found across a number of the ASSET scales for respondents with six or more years service.

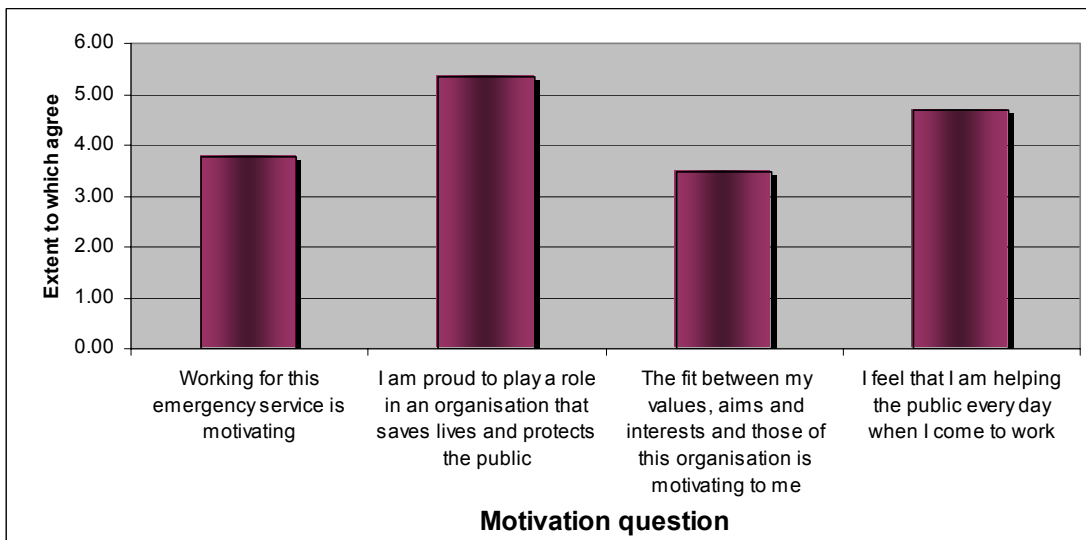
3. Additional Relevant Information

Bullying

- ❑ 25% of respondents say they have been harassed or bullied at work in the last 4 years – this level is typical for the public sector and slightly better than generally found in the Police Service
- ❑ 59% of those saying they had been harassed or bullied indicated this was within the last six months, and 63% said it was within their current department. The most common source being a manager or supervisor (69%), followed by a colleague or peer (32%).
- ❑ Positively, 84% of those indicating they had been subjected to bullying or harassment said they knew where to go for help.
- ❑ However, of those that reported bullying or harassment through official channels (25%), only 22% said it had been satisfactorily resolved.
- ❑ Evidence that management bullying behaviour is not extreme from ASSET items such as “aggressive management style” (sten 4) and “boss is forever finding fault” (sten 4).

Motivation

Four questions relating to motivation were added to the survey and the figure below (figure 3.1) shows the average response to each of the items. This indicates that pride in working for an organisation that saves lives and protects the public is a particularly key motivating aspect of working for London Fire Brigade.



**Figure 3.1 Average scores on Motivation items
(N.B. 1=Strongly disagree; 6=Strongly agree)**

It is interesting to note the trend in the motivation items by length of service (see figure 3.2 below).

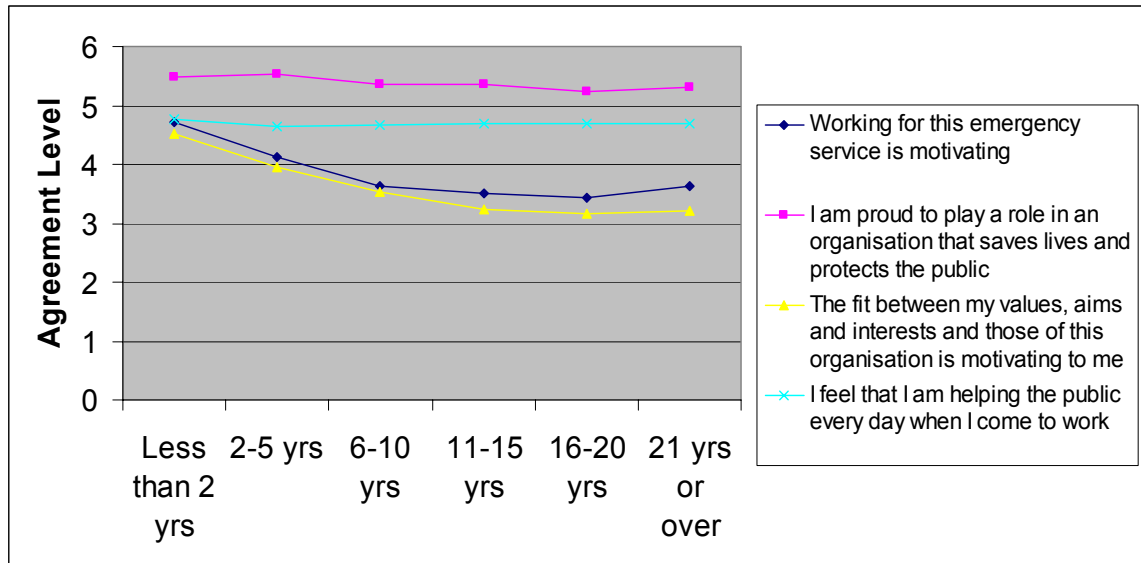


Figure 3.2 Motivation items by length of service

These results suggest a certain level of disengagement with the organisation after two years service has been reached. As already highlighted in relation to organisational commitment, this length of service effect is a common problem, particularly within the public sector and represents a significant challenge.

Additional Health issues

- ❑ 12% of respondents reported a significant illness within the last six months and 93% rated their overall health as 'good' or 'alright' over the same period.
- ❑ In terms of self reported productivity over the last six months, 59% of respondents rated this at 80% or above
- ❑ 58% of respondents said they had encountered a major stressful event over the last six months which had an important effect on them. Of these, 37% said the issue was work based
- ❑ 39% of the respondent sample reported two or more days off work through illness or injury over the past six months

4. Focus Group Outcomes

As a follow-up to the ASSET survey and as a means of assisting the interpretation of the results a number of staff focus groups were run by Robertson Cooper consultants in May 2006. Six discussion groups were run over two days, targeted at the following staff groups (number of attendees in brackets):

- Firefighters (N=8)
- Uniformed Middle Managers – Station based (N=11)
- Uniformed Middle Managers – Non-station based (N=4)
- Senior MG / PO grades (N=9)
- Junior MG grades (N=7)
- Senior Uniformed Personnel (N=7)

The group discussions lasted between one hour fifteen minutes and two hours. The key issues discussed in these groups are identified below. The intention is to follow-on with a series of additional focus groups run internally to explore further staff perceptions related to stress and well-being. The detailed output from the focus groups already run will be integrated with that captured from a wider range of discussions.

4.1 Firefighters

Key issues raised by this group are highlighted below.

General Pressures in the Job

- Perceived disconnect between management and station level, greater distance than in the past. High commitment to your watch or station but not the organisation.
- Pace of change accelerating beyond what is sensible, always changing priorities.

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- General agreement that relationships at work at station level are positive and that health seems no better or worse than is typical of other organisations.
- Work-life balance generally good but concerns about the impact on this of the changing shift system.
- Don't feel listened to by management, feeling that industrial relations and consultation have been poor since the strike.
- Resources and Communication: equipment generally good but training is not as good as in the past, too much reliance now on methods such as computer based and video training rather than face-to-face.
- Mixed views about whether it is beneficial to have to work on different watches – some felt it healthier to work with a wider range of people but others that there was a risk of losing team spirit and confidence in your colleagues built through years of working closely together.

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- ❑ Need stronger managers / senior figureheads who act as advocates for the fire service and don't just do whatever politicians want.
- ❑ Ensure procedures for post-traumatic stress are up to date and fully implemented.
- ❑ Better and more open communication, prefer to hear bad news than spin.
- ❑ Better quality of training and a re-statement of its importance.

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main themes were:

- ❑ Work colleagues and camaraderie.
- ❑ The work itself – fire fighting.

4.2 Uniformed Middle Managers – Station Based

This group was composed of a mix of Crew, Watch, and Station Managers.

General Pressures in the Job

- ❑ Mixed views on support from more senior managers. Perceptions varied from it being difficult to get someone to make a decision, to complaints about being micro managed.
- ❑ Pace of change difficult and change badly managed. Find it difficult to communicate reasons for change with Firefighters when you have not been provided with an explanation of the rationale yourself (e.g. station diary change).
- ❑ Rank to role increase in responsibilities have not been adequately supported with new training (e.g. performance assessment).

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- ❑ Workload varies greatly depending on the size of the station.
- ❑ Disconnected from senior management.
- ❑ Equipment dated (contrasting view to Firefighters' group)
- ❑ Pay and benefits – no incentive to move into line management, "can earn more as a driver"

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- ❑ Need more practical training, not always lectures.
- ❑ Reintroduce the Firefighters magazine – valued as a communication vehicle that told real stories about what people were doing, “you even used to get pictures of fires in it!”, not seen as a corporate news letter written for external PR.
- ❑ Senior managers need to listen more, and communicate back what happens with views and suggestions fed in. Need more senior management visibility at fire stations.
- ❑ Slow down pace of change!

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main theme was:

- ❑ Relationships with colleagues generally positive - because of the Watch system.

4.3 Uniformed Middle Managers – Non-Station Based

Key issues raised by this group are highlighted below.

General Pressures in the Job

- ❑ Endless requests for trivial information from HQ (e.g. number of chairs, number of ladders).
- ❑ Bureaucratic layers – slow decision making.
- ❑ Training not adequate for demands of role(s).

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- ❑ Difficult to get a straight answer from managers – feel they have to check everything before giving you an answer, this has got worse since the strike with a greater lack of trust.
- ❑ Lack of coherent policy / vision – don’t feel we know where the organisation is going.
- ❑ Difficult to know where your career is going now, more limited opportunities due to graduate entry.
- ❑ Resources can be poor, e.g. not enough computers. Fire stations still being built in dated irrelevant style (e.g. with towers).
- ❑ Work-life balance generally good but change in shift pattern is perceived as a threat.
- ❑ Station / Group managers are the main conduit for communications but not rewarded proportionately – thought to be partially responsible for poor psychological well-being at these levels.

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- ❑ Retain the current shift system.
- ❑ Need period of stability, with a focus on service delivery at the front line of the organisation.
- ❑ Need more and better training and career development support.
- ❑ Better long term planning and programme management.

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main themes were:

- ❑ Communication with communities (public), generally a good rapport with the public.
- ❑ Variety of work.
- ❑ People you work with and doing something worthwhile.

4.4 Senior MG / PO Grades

Key issues raised by this group are highlighted below.

General Pressures in the Job

- ❑ Volume of e-mails, and lack of shared understanding of when and how to use this means of communication.
- ❑ Incompatible IT systems (e.g. with Partner Agencies).
- ❑ Too many poor meetings.
- ❑ Too many new initiatives.

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- ❑ Increasing gap between senior and middle managers, them and us mentality.
- ❑ Being held accountable for KPIs which are beyond your control.
- ❑ Job evaluation – seen as a cost saving scheme.
- ❑ Poor systems and record keeping make it hard to find information and lead to requests from Fire stations for what they believe is trivial information
- ❑ No local budgetary control. Punishments for one or two abuses in the past is to take all control back to senior central level – leaves managers feeling disempowered.
- ❑ Pay and benefits – widening gap between senior and middle managers, and perceived treats to pension benefits.
- ❑ MG8-10 level feel more threatened and less job secure as they can see the scope of their roles being lost to those above and below them.

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- ❑ Need a fundamental review of the way the organisation works to make it more efficient and less bureaucratic.
- ❑ More frequent and open communication across management levels. Need to present reality of situation warts and all without need for positive spin.
- ❑ Need for stations and HQ to develop better understanding of each other.
- ❑ Need for true empowerment to professionals, give them the scope to do their jobs well. Corporate centre should set direction but not try to micro-manage the implementation of all projects. Need strategic leadership more than operational control.

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main themes were:

- ❑ Meeting people at the fires stations when you get the chance.
- ❑ Delivering services that are worthwhile that have long term benefits
- ❑ Variety, everyday is different.

4.5 Junior MG Grades

Key issues raised by this group are highlighted below.

General Pressures in the Job

- ❑ Getting things done – always seem to be barriers, tend to overcomplicate straight forward requests. Hierarchical structure doesn't help.
- ❑ Difficult to get timely and accurate information. Your priorities aren't necessarily shared by others.

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- ❑ Just feel like a number now, seems to be constant restructuring without a clear rationale. Feels out of control, no continuity.
- ❑ Loss of role clarity.
- ❑ Poor IT systems.
- ❑ Poor communication between areas and departments / directorates.

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- ❑ Need to understand the big picture better, not just narrow focus of own area.
- ❑ Need managers with better people management skills.
- ❑ Under-performance needs to be addressed, at all levels.
- ❑ More openness and transparency needed to counteract growing mistrust and cynicism.
- ❑ Job evaluation - better to be told it is a pay review than it will benefit all staff.

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main themes were:

- People you work with, good camaraderie.
- Relationships generally positive, more respect for diversity than in the past.
- Great when you have a supportive line manager.
- Benefits – time-off, flexibility.
- Pride in working for London Fire Brigade.
- Benefits and work-life balance generally good, better than in the private sector.

4.6 Senior Uniformed Personnel

Key issues raised by this group are highlighted below.

General Pressures in the Job

- Slow decision making due to political aspects of decision making.
- Operating in a bit of a strategic vacuum with work coming in from various directions without a strong vision or direction to drive prioritisation.
- Substantial change is necessary as we have stood still as an organisation for too long, but lots of changes not well enough understood or communicated.

Main Specific Sources of Pressure

- Promotion pressures – feeling that opportunities for promotion to senior levels disappearing with future senior roles more likely to be filled by non-uniformed staff.
- Information overload – compounded by using e-mail as the preferred management communication route.
- Old fashioned thinking (e.g. finding more sophisticated ways of providing route cards rather than going for Sat Nav).
- Perception of still significant down time available to Firefighters that needs to be used more productively – significant debate within the group about the extent to which this was the case in reality.
- Perception of too much political interference.

Realistic Solutions

The group were asked what they thought were the realistic key priorities for improvement:

- Straight talking, better to give bad news than a fake rosy picture.
- Need equivalent of old telephone directory with short description of who everyone is and what they do – would help to know better who needs to see information.
- Need a clearer service focused vision.
- Visit stations more and talk to front line staff.
- Spend more time with first and second line managers.
- More strategic leadership – better prioritisation.

Most Positive Aspects of the Job

The group was asked what they enjoyed about doing the job they do, the main themes were:

- ❑ Commitment to fire prevention not just fire fighting.
- ❑ Relationships with the public.

5. Summary and Provisional Recommendations

The focus groups provide rich qualitative information to support the findings of the ASSET survey. However, they represent the views of only a small cross-section of staff, particularly at the Firefighter and lower main grade levels. Therefore, the key findings of this project in terms of the summary and provisional recommendations are based mainly on the quantitative evidence produced from the ASSET survey.

Key Positive Outcomes

- Relationships at peer / colleague levels in London Fire Brigade are generally as good as, or better than, those found in most organisations.
- Generally, health levels are typical of the general working population.
- Perceived workload demands at non-management levels are no worse than, and often better than, those which is typical in the general working population.

Key Perceived Issues

- Job / Role uncertainty (change concerns, feeling of skills becoming redundant) is fairly widespread.
- Perceived lack of control and influence in comparison to that typical in other organisations.
- Lack of information and training troubles staff to a greater extent than in most other organisations.
- Perception of poor pay and benefits.
- Staff feel very positive about the organisation in their first two years of service, this then declines sharply – not that unusual in the public sector, but still a management challenge
- Overall, a fairly typical picture of an organisation undergoing major change, and in many respects typical of others in the Public Sector.

Provisional Recommendations

These recommendations are offered for further discussion, and eventual formation into an agreed action plan linked to the HSE Stress Management Standards.

- R1 Communicate the results of this audit openly with all staff, including the management response to its findings.
- R2 Review change programmes and initiatives, current and planned, and communicate a clear vision of how it will feel to work for London Fire Brigade in the short to medium term. Be as clear and open as possible about the service led behaviours expected of staff and the difficulties and problems that must be overcome to ensure the vision is realized effectively.
- R3 Consider communication initiatives for closing the perceived gap between senior management and station level management / Firefighters. These may include increased visits by senior managers to fire stations as well as an increase in management contact between station level managers and more senior managers.

- R4 Review current training provision to ensure it is adequate and delivered fully and to the highest possible standards.
- R5 Ensure senior and middle managers are trained in change management skills.
- R6 Consider initiatives to improve communication and role awareness between HQ and fire stations and across departments / directorates. For example, departmental “Open Days” where all staff are invited to informally visit areas or departments they know little about and talk to the people that work there. Consider realistic “day in the life” type features in internal newsletters.
- R7 Develop and target Personal Resilience Training at groups with poor health scores from this survey (e.g. Group and Station Managers, staff from Ops Planning). The training should cover aspects such as Working Smarter, Thinking Positively (using Cognitive-Behavioural techniques) and Lifestyle Management. Evaluate the impact of this training on stress levels.

Appendix A

Description of ASSET Scales

Work relationships

Many jobs demand regular contact with other people at work. Poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues and/or supervisors can be a potential source of pressure. In addition, pressure can occur if individuals feel isolated or unfairly treated. This subscale measures the impact of work relationships as a source of pressure.

Work-life balance

The demands of work have the potential to spill over and affect personal and home life and so put a strain on relationships outside work. This subscale measures the extent to which difficulty in maintaining a satisfactory work-life balance is a source of pressure.

Overload

This subscale measures the extent to which individuals feel that the demands of their workload and the associated time pressures are a source of pressure.

Job security

For many individuals a lack of job security and uncertainty about the future can be a significant source of pressure. While significantly less employees now expect 'a job for life', fear of job loss or obsolescence still remains a major potential source of stress. This scale measures the extent to which lack of job security and job changes are a source of pressure.

Control

The experience of pressure is strongly linked to perceptions of control. Lack of influence and consultation in the way in which work is organised and performed can be a potential source of pressure.

Resources and communication

To perform a job effectively, individuals need to feel that they have appropriate training, equipment and resources. They also need to feel that they are adequately informed and that they are valued. This subscale measures the extent to which these factors are a source of workplace pressure.

Pay and benefits

The financial rewards associated with a job are important in terms of lifestyle. They are also often perceived to be an indication of an individual's self worth and value to the organisation. This scale measures the extent to which pay and benefits are a potential source of pressure.

Aspects of the job

This subscale measures potential sources of stress that relate to the fundamental nature of the job itself. Factors such as the physical working conditions, type of tasks and the amount of satisfaction derived from the job.

Commitment of employee to organisation

The relationship between employer and employee involves mutual obligation. Employers expect their employees to do their best and be loyal and committed to the organisation. This scale measures the extent to which employees feel committed to the organisation.

Commitment of organisation to employee

The relationship between employer and employee involves mutual obligations. Employees expect to be trusted and feel it is worth going the extra mile for the organisation. This scale measures the extent to which employees feel that the organisation is committed to them.

Physical health

Poor employee health can be indicative of excessive workplace pressure and experienced stress. To enable you to ascertain whether levels of pressure are having an optimal or negative effect, ASSET measures a range of common symptoms associated with risks to physical health.

Psychological well-being

Poor employee health can be indicative of excessive workplace pressure and experienced stress. To enable you to discover whether levels of pressure are having an optimal or negative effect, ASSET measures a range of common symptoms associated with risks to psychological wellbeing.