

Local authority noise control

Officers in a local authority noise control enforcement unit patrol a district at night and over the weekend, dealing with noise complaints from neighbours.

Problem

The work of the noise patrol is inherently stressful. Officers often have to get people to do things they don't want to do, and there is a threat of abuse and physical violence. In this unit, there was also a growing awareness that resources were not being used effectively to cover the busy and quiet times.

Assessing the risks and finding solutions

The manager of this unit, in consultation with staff and their representatives, carried out a risk assessment and staff survey, as well as running one-to-one and team meetings on a regular basis with the staff in the unit. One of the key outcomes of this approach was to change the way in which the officers work.

- *Double manning* - Working alone can be a severe mental strain, especially if combined with other risks, such as violence or harassment. While many councils

ask their officers to work alone in this job role, in this unit following the risk assessment the normal procedure is now that the eight officers work in pairs, for mental wellbeing as well as physical safety.

- *Personal protective equipment* - It is important that employees feel supported and safe in their work. In addition to phone contact, all officers on patrol go out in 'stab jackets' as a precautionary measure.
- *Team meetings* - Managers acknowledge officers' first-hand experience, and actively include them when investigating dangerous incidents. They also invite staff to recommend improvements to the service, both for themselves and for customers as the opportunity arises.

Results

Staff report that they feel safer, and indicate this is largely through the increased support they now feel they have. Although the officers may be able to investigate fewer incidents because they are working in pairs, the standard of service has not been compromised.

- *Applying common sense solutions agreed with staff and their representatives can provide simple and cost effective interventions.*
- *Risk assessment is key to tackling work-related stress, particularly when defining the local context.*