

STRESS MANAGEMENT

1. STATEMENT

- 1.1. The Poole Housing Partnership, as a caring employer, recognises and is committed, as far as is reasonably practicable, to provide a safe, healthy working environment with regard to the physical and psychological wellbeing of its employees.

The Poole Housing Partnership will aim to identify, assess and reduce all areas of risk which could adversely affect the well-being of its employees and which may result in stress.

The Policy will apply to all Poole Housing Partnership employees. All will be encouraged to recognise the responsibility of Poole Housing Partnership, for the health and safety of their employees.

2. PRINCIPLES RELATING TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

The Poole Housing Partnership will:

- 2.1. Aim for a healthy workforce, working in a safe and acceptable environment
- 2.2. Aim to identify and control occupational stress
- 2.3. Aim to raise the understanding of all employees, including Managers, of their personal responsibilities at work
- 2.4. Regularly review and monitor all related Policies and, where the need is identified, recommend new Policies on related issues
- 2.5. Provide training to raise awareness and to support the Policy
- 2.6. Aim for suitable re-introduction programmes for employees returning to work, which includes, where appropriate, support
- 2.7. Conduct a fair and reasonable approach to work attendance
- 2.8. Provide employees with appropriate levels of support via Managers, Supervisors, Welfare Officer and Occupational Health practitioners
- 2.9. Ensure the operation of safe and effective Complaint, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures

3. CORE STANDARDS RELATING TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

The Management Team will be expected to support this Policy and the core standards.

- 3.1. To ensure that employees have access to and are fully aware of the Policy Statement, statutory requirements and underlying principles, and the support available to them.
- 3.2. The provision of related training and development services to support the Stress Management Policy.
- 3.3. The Poole Housing Partnership recognises the importance of Employee Development Interviews and strongly believes that all Service Units should be committed to it. This creates an opportunity to consider priorities, management of workload and avoidance of stress through joint planning.
- 3.4. The provision of a Management Development Programme in order to ensure that Managers help to develop and support employees.
- 3.5. Access to a confidential support and counselling service.
- 3.6. The provision of safe and effective Complaints, Grievance and Disciplinary procedures.

GUIDELINES

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1. Stress is an unavoidable part of life.

Stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the pressures encountered and the resources available to meet these pressures. Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. It arises when they worry that they can't cope.

When the pressure recedes, there is usually a quick return to normal. It is when the pressures are intense or prolonged that problems occur. People feel trapped, unable to exert control and confused by conflicting demands placed on them.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 All employees have a responsibility to work towards minimising stress within the Authority.

2.2 The Poole Housing Partnership has a duty of care towards all employees as well as a legal and moral responsibility to identify and manage work related stress.

2.3 Managers have a responsibility for implementing Policies within their Service Unit (see Section 4 - Related Policies).

2.4 Management have a responsibility to support the Policy.

2.5 Managers have a responsibility to guide, direct and support employees.

2.6 Employees have a responsibility to co-operate with the Poole Housing Partnership's Policy.

3. LEGISLATION

3.1. There is no specific legislation to control stress at work, however, where stress poses a threat to employees' health, employers have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, action is taken to reduce the risk. Employers must provide a safe work environment together with a safe system of work.

The Act includes within its scope, the prevention of stress related illness, both physical and psychological.

- 3.2. Employers have a duty to carry out risk assessments in relation to health and safety under the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- 3.3. The Equalities ACT 2010 implies that employees can be disabled as a result of stress.
- 3.4. Stress should be treated in the same way as any other health hazard. Failure to recognise this could be viewed as a “Breach of Care” and could result in the Poole Housing Partnership being held legally responsible.
- 3.5. The Poole Housing Partnership’s responsibility essentially applies to employees whilst at work or carrying out their duties, but the Poole Housing Partnership will deal sympathetically with employees suffering from other stresses which may impact on their work.

4. RELATED POLICIES

The following are Policies which support and complement the Stress Management Policy:

- Dealing with Violence, Aggression and Threatening Behaviour.
- Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure.
- A Policy for Managing Diversity.
- Managing Sickness Absence.
- Health and Safety.
- Grievance Procedure/Local Appeals Machinery.
- Aids Policy Statement.

together with any subsequent Policies the Poole Housing Partnership may approve.

5. MONITORING AND REVIEWING

- 5.1. All Managers have a responsibility to monitor the implementation of the Policy.
- 5.2. The Health and Safety and Welfare and Occupational Health Officers have a responsibility to monitor and review the Policy.

6. SUPPORT AND ADVICE

- 6.1. Support and advice in respect of this and other related Policies can be obtained from Managers, HR and the Director of Technical Services.

7. POST TRAUMATIC STRESS

- 7.1. Any incident experienced which is sudden and unexpected can result in emotional as well as physical trauma and shock. Emotional shock can cause stress reactions which may be identified as Post Trauma Stress (P.T.S.) or Critical Incident Stress (C.I.S.)

P.T.S. is defined as normal reactions to an abnormal event. Only when the stress is prolonged, recurring and debilitating does it become a disorder, commonly recognised as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

POLICY STATEMENT AND GUIDANCE ON STRESS MANAGEMENT

APPENDIX A

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS

1. Some employees will work on a daily basis with the prospect of encountering distressing or shocking situations. Whilst there is no right or wrong way of reacting to violent, abusive or traumatic events, it is of vital importance to the individual's ability to cope and recover that appropriate support is offered on a timely basis.

This support should include the provision of practical help with external pressures such as assisting with reporting the incident and giving advice and guidance on related legal matters.

Post Incident Support should also involve debriefing all employees affected by the trauma. This will follow referral to the Poole Housing Partnership's Welfare Officer and should take place within 72 hours of the incident.

Debriefing, known as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing or Psychological Debriefing, must be carried out by trained Debriefers. All Stress training will include information about C.I.S.D.

2. POSSIBLE REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS

2.1 Feelings

- Sense of pointlessness
- Increased anxiety and vulnerability
- Loss of confidence
- Intrusive images, thoughts and flashbacks
- Nightmares and sleep disturbances
- Shame, anger, regret, blame, guilt
- Sense of isolation and loneliness
- Fear of the incident being repeated

2.2 Behaviour

- Inability to make decisions
- Impulsive actions
- Irritability and lack of concentration
- Avoidance tactics

2.3 Physical Effects

- Illness of unspecific nature
- Listlessness
- Excitement and hyperactivity
- Increased or decreased sexual desire
- Increased smoking or drinking

A POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

APPENDIX B

CAUSES, SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS, AND METHODS OF REDUCING STRESS

Employees can be affected by pressures outside the Poole Housing Partnership's control. Bereavement, family illness, and other personal situations can make employees more vulnerable to stressful situations at work. This can affect judgement and performance.

Negative stress damages physical, mental and emotional health. Physical effects include fatigue, headaches, high blood pressure. Psychological effects reduce concentration and the ability to apply new information, think creatively or see fresh solutions. Emotionally, we may feel depressed, anxious, panicky. The causes and sources of stress are immensely complex with infinite variables. The following details outline:

1. Possible work related causes
2. Signs and symptoms of stress
3. Methods of reducing stress

1. POSSIBLE WORK RELATED CAUSES

- Lack of promotion or over-promotion
- Being under-utilised and undervalued
- Management style
- Role conflict or ambiguity
- Long or irregular hours
- Exposure to actual or potential violence
- Boredom
- Lack of consultation, imposed decisions
- Undefined roles and responsibilities
- Change and uncertainty
- Environmental factors, e.g. noise, climate, pollutants
- Constant exposure to human suffering
- Harassment and bullying
- Being subjected to verbal abuse, violence or danger
- Relocation and change in environment
- Unrealistic deadlines
- Empowerment - too little/too much
- Lack of resources
- Working relationship conflict

2. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Physical, psychological and behavioural changes may include:

- Being depressed, feeling low, low self esteem
- Being unresponsive to others
- Being resistant to change
- Unable to make decisions
- Suffering relationship problems
- Under-performance
- Irritability and intolerance
- Evidence of problem drinking
- Sickness absence
- Loss of humour
- Inability to concentrate
- Constant tiredness
- Exhaustion
- Drug dependency

3. METHODS OF REDUCING STRESS

The following are practical ways that would help to minimise stress:

- Provide practical support from managers
- Conduct Employee Development interviews, as this is a primary Method of managing workload and avoiding stress through planning
- Maintain effective communication at all levels
- Maintain a flexible approach
- Recognise the need for encouragement
- Prioritise workloads and agree realistic deadlines and working hours
- Achieve a balanced lifestyle
- Recognise when to seek professional advice and support
- Identify and implement Development Programmes aimed at competence and confidence
- Employee support
- Identifying the problem
- Acknowledgement of efforts

These lists are not intended to be exhaustive.

A POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

APPENDIX C

RISK ASSESSMENT

1. DESCRIPTION OF RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk assessments need to take into account workloads and methods of work which place employees under undue levels of stress. Factors likely to cause stress in employees include:

- Physical factors (e.g. heat or noise)
- Continuous and unreasonable pace of work
- Lack of control over work
- Inadequate managerial support
- Demanding work schedules
- Feelings of isolation
- Lengthy periods of repetitive monotonous work
- Conflict situations

2. PERSONS AT RISK

Individuals are affected by pressure and stress in different ways. Some employees may find a certain level of pressure to be challenging, while other employees may find the same level leads to harmful stress. However, all employees have a threshold above which stress becomes harmful and dysfunctional. This should be monitored and assessed through regular Employee Development Interviews. Individuals and Managers should seek to resolve any problems identified through this assessment process. Further guidance may be obtained from Personnel and Training Services. It needs to be acknowledged that the threshold varies from individual to individual. The Poole Housing Partnership owes an individual duty of care towards each employee.

3. RISK ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The following actions should eliminate or reduce the risk associated to an acceptable level. An assessment of the risk of work-related stress is likely to form part of a wider work assessment, but the principles outlined here can be incorporated into a risk assessment.

4. PLANNING AND ORGANISING

The Poole Housing Partnership will ensure that, where possible, staff are not at risk of work-related stress disorder. This will be achieved through the following control measures.

Identification and classification of risk areas and tasks. Such assessments should take into account managing:

- Workload
- Deadlines
- Methods of work
- Workplace environment
- Employee control over the work and the workplace environment

Introduction of control measures, including:

- Reviewing the relevance of tasks and eliminating where necessary
- Minimisation of the stress levels through re-design of the task
- Screening of individuals to carry out tasks with high stress levels where the task cannot either be eliminated or modified in order to reduce the stress levels
- Training of employees carrying out tasks with high stress levels in order for them to recognise symptoms of stress-related disorders and to be able to monitor and reduce stress levels in themselves
- Arrangements to minimise the risk of harm from violence, which is a major cause of stress
- Confidential counselling for employees
- Introduction of an agreed stress policy in order that everyone is aware of the issue and of the correct procedures to adopt.

5. MANAGEMENT CONTROL

As far as is reasonably practicable only employees who have been trained to recognise dysfunctional levels of stress in themselves and in methods of stress reduction, should be exposed to activities which may result in high stress levels.

Sickness and absenteeism records, along with employee turnover, can indicate that stress may be an underlying problem.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEWING

This risk assessment should be reviewed annually by Managers, or after any of the following:

- Any reported complaint or injury,
- The introduction of new working methods or substantial changes to existing working methods,
- Where new employees replace those undertaking activities assessed as having high levels of stress.

Guidelines are provided in the Arrangement Section (Part 3) of the Health and Safety Policy.