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MANAGING STRESS POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Milnbank Housing Association recognises as an employer, that it has a duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that its working environment for all employees is healthy and safe. We also recognise that our duty of care extends to mental health as well as physical health at work. We understand it is our requirement to assess how reasonably foreseeable harm is to employees, but also, that there is an onus on employees to make the Association aware that they are suffering from stress or poor mental health.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

Through our policy we are committed to providing a supportive working environment that maintains and promotes the health and well-being of all our employees. This includes the organisational environment through effective and sensitive management; enabling individuals to cope successfully with the demands and pressures of work, and providing support for employees whose health and well-being are affected by stress.

3. DEFINITION

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "*the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them*". This makes an important distinction between pressures, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health.

Pressures can also arise from an individual's personal life as well as from work. People vary in their capacity and ability to cope with different types of pressure. Some individuals will recognise that their health is affected and will seek help; others will not recognise or acknowledge that they are stressed, although it may be apparent to their manager and work colleagues. In itself, stress is not an illness, however, there is evidence that stress can lead to mental and physical ill health.

4. SOURCE OF STRESS

Stress may arise from various sources (e.g. in the workplace or away from work). Whilst we have no control over the latter, we are committed to identifying the sources of stress in the workplace and trying to eliminate them. Workplace stress may arise from the following:

- Poor physical conditions: Noise, poor ventilation, lighting or equipment.
- Job design: Under use of skills, conflicting demands and inconsistent management, unclear setting of objectives.
- Work relationships: Bullying or other harassment, poor management, communication.
- Work organisation and conditions: Job insecurity/threat of redundancy, excessive workload, lack of participation in decision making, rigid

hierarchy, lack of transparency in procedures, lack of support, reluctance to take/not taking holidays, sick leave, etc.

5. SIGNALS & REPORTING STRESS

Stress is not confined to a particular job role or status; any one can suffer from stress at any time within their life.

One of the key things to look out for is a change within an individual's normal personality or behaviour. Stress may be physical, psychological, behavioural or a combination. Many effects are short term response to pressure which disappears once the source of pressure has been removed. If pressure continues it can result in the individual experiencing anxiety, anger and frustration, irritability, intolerance and possibly over indulgence in alcohol or tobacco.

Physically, stress may manifest itself by sleep disturbance resulting in tiredness, tenseness, nausea and dizziness, headaches, weight loss/gain and in extreme circumstances, by chest pains, raised blood pressure and heart disease. Mentally it may show itself by indecision, lack of concentration, memory loss, and lack of judgement, loss of motivation and impairment of perception.

Reporting Stress – Employees should inform HR or their line manager promptly of any concerns they may have about their wellbeing and work circumstances which could potentially lead to work-related stress. HR and/or line managers will take all reports of stress seriously, in confidence, and set aside time to fully explore the possible reasons for the employee reporting stress.

If an employee fails to inform the Association they are stressed and instead submits a fit note from their GP for "work related stress", HR will act on this immediately and arrange a meeting with the employee to complete an *Individual Employee Stress Questionnaire* to identify what factors may be contributing to their stress and determine the support required from MHA as the Employer.

6. POLICY AIMS

The aim of MHA's Managing Stress Policy is:

- To raise awareness of mental ill health, including stress, its causes and associated factors.
- To create a safe environment where staff feel comfortable opening up and discussing any struggles they are experiencing.
- To raise awareness of the Organisations Mental Health First Aiders, Counselling and Occupational Health services that are available to combat poor mental health and stress.
- To involve staff in a problem solving approach to tackle stress.
- To manage stress through effective and sensitive management.

- To develop working practices that will reduce the factors which may lead to stress in the workplace.
- To develop procedures to manage problems that do occur and to support individuals who are stressed.
- To increase awareness of stress and methods to combat it.
- To assist employees in managing pressure in themselves and others.
- To monitor procedures and outcomes, and to assess the effectiveness of the policy.
- To ensure the risks arising from work-related stress are adequately controlled. This will be evidenced by carrying out, documenting, communicating and periodically reviewing a suitable and sufficient work-related risk assessment.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

To help combat stress and achieve a well managed work environment, there will be preventative measures in place at all levels:

a) EMPLOYEE LEVEL

- All employees will be made aware of the Managing Stress policy.
- A culture of consultation, participation and open communication will be promoted.
- Effective systems are in place for employees dealing with e.g. interpersonal conflict, bullying, racial and sexual harassment, through appropriate steps given in our Prevention from Harassment Policy.
- A comprehensive Health and Safety policy is in place.
- Employees will be encouraged to attend stress awareness and stress management courses, so they are better equipped to handle the pressures they may encounter.
- Employees will be reminded that they have a duty, while at work, to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and therefore, they have a responsibility to make the Management Team or HR aware of pressures they are encountering at work.
- Employees will be encouraged to address potential work problems at an early stage by reporting pressures that they are encountering at work by:
 - Asking for support from their Line Manager or HR
 - Private discussion with the Association's Mental Health First Aiders
 - Attending suitable Counselling

b) MANAGEMENT & HR LEVEL

- Take account of potential sources of pressure on employees when planning changes to work organisation and conditions of employment.
- To provide clear job descriptions which are regularly reviewed.
- Give warning of urgent/important tasks and monitor the frequency/duration.
- Provide clear objectives.
- Be competent and consistent.
- Encourage good two-way communication and employee involvement.

- Carry out a suitable and sufficient work-related stress risk assessment.
- Encourage a workplace culture in which mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing are regarded as equally important.
- Allow staff to contribute ideas and have some influence over decision-making, especially regarding their own work, and provide good management support, appropriate training and staff development.
- Ensure that occupational health and employee counselling services are accessible for all staff members (details below).
- Ensure that all policies, procedures and code of conduct are appropriate and updated accordingly.
- Monitoring staff conduct, attendance, turnover and evaluating recruitment practices in relation to equal opportunities.
- Promote access to the Mental Health First Aiders within the Organisation, the plan to reduce stressors and promote positive mental health.

c) EMPLOYEE COUNSELLING

The Counselling service from The Spark, contracted by the Association, provides a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline for employees to call directly and receive emotional support by a team of professionally trained Counsellors. The helpline offers up to 30 minutes immediate support and can be accessed multiple times; there is no limit to the number of sessions employees receive via the helpline.

As well as the telephone helpline, referrals for one to one Counselling sessions are available, and can be made as follows:

- Self-Referrals: Can be made by any staff member accessing the telephone helpline. The Association will only receive statistical information about numbers who access the helpline. However, it is necessary for self-referrals to be approved by HR in order to monitor spend.
- HR Referrals: Will be made if HR feel that the employee may be dealing with problems which appear to be having an effect on their mental health and/or their performance at work. HR Referrals will remain confidential, unless it is necessary to inform the employee's line manager of their attendance at Counselling.

d) OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

MHA will refer Employees to Medigold Health to provide occupational health advice and undertake private medical assessments. Referrals are made by HR for the following reasons (this list is not exhaustive):

- Support for staff who may be experiencing the negative effects of poor mental or physical health.
- Support for staff who are absent from work, on long-term sick leave, in order to assess their capability to continue within their current role

or to determine adjustments that are required/factors to consider to facilitate their return to work.

- Any other medical reason deemed appropriate by MHA as the Employer and as agreed with the Employee.

8. MONITORING STRESS LEVELS

Stress complaints will be taken seriously, investigated, and resolved if possible. Commitment will be given to ensure problems are not ignored. To help with this commitment the Managing Attendance Policy, Conditions of Service and Health and Safety manual will be reviewed and updated in line with the Policy Development and Review Schedule.

In addition to these policies, Milnbank will invite staff to participate in an annual work-related stress questionnaire as part of our Health and Safety procedures. All employees will be required to undertake risk assessments and will have responsibility to ensure preventative measures to control risks are adhered to. The significant findings of these risk assessments will be recorded. Naturally, these preventative measures will be evaluated periodically for effectiveness.

9. REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed annually by the Management Committee or as otherwise deemed necessary.

10. DATA PROTECTION

MHA controls the personal information that we collect, this means that we are legally responsible for how we collect, hold and use personal information. It also means that we are required to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when collecting, holding and using personal information.