

Managing stress within the LFB

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 Responsible work team: **Wellbeing, Health and Fitness**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the Brigade's arrangements for supporting and managing staff who experience stress. This should be applied in conjunction with Policy number 1002 – Mental health: promote, prevent and treat and Policy number 1005 – Supporting health and wellbeing policy.
- 1.2 This policy should be applied in line with the Brigade's values:
 - Service – We put the public first.
 - Courage – We step up to the challenge.
 - Learning – We listen so that we can improve.
 - Teamwork – We work together and include everyone.
 - Equity – We treat everyone fairly according to their needs.
 - Integrity – We act with honesty.

2 A definition of stress

- 2.1 Stress can be defined as '*the adverse reaction to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on an individual*' - Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Some pressures can be stimulating; they can challenge, encourage, concentrate the mind and help to keep people motivated. Stress is a reaction to excessive, or in some cases too little, pressure. The intensity of the stress response is determined, at least in part, both by the individual's appraisal of the situation and how the individual copes with the environments they face and this is recognised as varying from person to person.
- 2.2 Stress is not a single, specific response or a recognised medical condition in itself; it is a general label or 'umbrella' term which is used to refer to a broad and diverse range of emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

3 Causes of stress

- 3.1 The Brigade recognises that there are a range of contributory factors, both acute and chronic, to individual stress. It is therefore committed to a comprehensive approach to encompass the distinct areas that are contributory factors to stress. The following list, although not exhaustive, are some of the sources associated with stress:
 - Personal/domestic.
 - Organisational.
 - Attendance at (some) operational incidents.
 - Internal and external change.
 - Interpersonal relationships.
 - Workloads.
 - Bullying and harassment.
- 3.2 Internal and external influences can result in increased demands on the service, and organisational sources of stress can affect staff at all levels. Among the diverse sources of stress identified above, the HSE has identified the following as key risk factors: the demands of the job, the level of control over the work, the support that is received, the relationships at work, the individual's role in the organisation and how well it is understood, and how change is managed and communicated.

- 3.3 It is recognised that attendance at or involvement in traumatic incidents, especially those involving multiple fatalities or the death of children or colleagues, can induce symptoms of stress and anxiety for groups or individuals. These can result in feelings of sadness and helplessness in the face of loss. Such reactions are normal, but in isolated cases these feelings can remain unresolved and undiminished and may result in an individual suffering from the medical condition known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- 3.4 The sources of personal and domestic stress vary greatly from individual to individual, but some commonality can be established from the following:
- Family illness and bereavement.
 - Relationships with partners, children, parents and other family members.
 - Financial problems.
 - Problems with dependency on alcohol, drugs, gambling or anti-social behaviour.
 - The effects of being a victim of crime.

4 Symptoms and effects of stress

- 4.1 Stress can manifest itself in a number of ways and some symptoms associated with stress are: headaches/migraines, insomnia/changes to sleep patterns, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, susceptibility to illness and/or accidents, lack of appetite and noticeable weight loss or weight gain. Stress may also lead to an increase in the consumption of alcohol, drugs and/or cigarettes, all of which are potentially harmful to health.
- 4.2 Stress has also been associated with a number of serious ill health conditions such as heart disease, raised blood pressure, ulcers and depression, as well as with minor disorders such as indigestion, nausea, skin rashes, excessive tiredness and muscle pain.
- 4.3 The effects of stress on an organisation can include a loss of motivation in staff, declining performance, poor time keeping, becoming withdrawn or argumentative, raised sickness absence and high staff turnover.

5 Positive action to manage employee stress

- 5.1 The Brigade cannot eliminate all internal pressures, nor would this be desirable. In addition, the Brigade has little or no influence over external stressors. It is nevertheless, committed to identifying, mitigating and/or removing, where possible, inappropriate levels and sources of internal pressure which are likely to cause stress to individuals. In order to achieve this, the Brigade must be clear about risks within the organisation. It also recognises that some members of its workforce, due to their individual make-up and/or the particular nature of their work, may be potentially more exposed to such pressures than others.
- 5.2 The overall approach to stress management for the Brigade will be one that adopts a risk-based approach. The Brigade's primary focus will be to avoid undue stress in the workplace. However, all organisations are likely from time to time to have staff affected by stress and as such, measures to identify and assess sources of stress and those at most risk is needed with the necessary action taken to address the cases highlighted.
- 5.3 In April 2016, alongside implementation of Policy number 1005 – Supporting health and wellbeing policy, the Brigade adopted the Appendix 1 document 'Work-Related Stress: Guidelines', 'Workplace Stress Questionnaire' and an updated 'Stress – risk assessment and action plan'.

6 Assessing the risks

- 6.1 Risk assessment is the process of looking forward to anticipate and prevent harm before it occurs. The risk assessment process is designed to identify hazards, assess the risk to health and safety, prevent the hazard(s) from occurring or if it cannot be avoided, controlling the risks in order that they are reduced or minimised.
- 6.2 A risk assessment approach represents a set of measures used to identify potential stressors within the workplace and can be carried out on both an organisational and individual level.
- 6.3 The aim of this process is to explore the areas that are causing stress to the individual, focusing in the first instance on performance at work and working with the individual to identify what steps can be taken to support them in their work. It may be that temporary or relatively minor changes can help to alleviate the feelings of stress.
- 6.4 Staff will be asked by their line manager to complete the 'Workplace Stress Questionnaire' and to discuss this with their line manager (or where the employee would prefer, another appropriate manager) in the first instance. Managers should discuss the purpose of this questionnaire with the employee and offer the option of either the employee completing the questionnaire first and then discussing it, or, alternatively, meeting with the manager and completing the questionnaire together.
- 6.5 Any actions or possible solutions should be noted and a date to review progress agreed on the stress - risk assessment report.
- 6.6 Essentially the aim is to:
- Identify sources of stress.
 - Evaluate the severity of stress levels identified.
 - Highlight areas of risk.
 - Evaluate the Brigade's policies and procedures for preventing and/or mitigating stress.
 - Recommend interventions that would reduce employee exposure to stress.
 - Satisfy health and safety law requirements.
- 6.7 A manager (when this is not appropriate, an alternative member of staff of the same grade as the manager) must conduct a risk assessment in the event of a member of staff returning to work, having been absent from work due to stress and consider as necessary, any adjustments that may be required, irrespective of whether the stress is work related or not. Risk assessments conducted should be in line with any information/guidance provided by the Brigade's Occupational Health Service (OHS). Where a manager does not feel a risk assessment is necessary, this should be noted in the employee's return to work meeting (RTWM).
- 6.8 A manager will need to consider conducting a risk assessment in the event of a member of staff presenting any or all of the following behavioural changes in the work place.
- Becoming withdrawn.
 - Being aggressive.
 - Manifestation of poor time keeping.
 - Interpersonal problems.
 - Sporadic periods of un-certificated sickness absence.
 - Irrational behaviour.
- 6.9 The above list, although not exhaustive, contains some of the triggers for a manager to note and act upon. Exploring the areas that are causing stress, focussing in the first instance on performance at work, is a legitimate role of a manager. Listening to the individual's concerns, offering a sympathetic ear and giving reassurance may be all that is needed in some cases.

Communicating with the member of staff in an open and honest way may lead on to issues outside of the working environment, which a manager may or may not be able to deal with given what is being presented. To this end, managers and staff can utilise the specialist resources available to them, as detailed in section 9 of this policy.

- 6.10 In summary, a stress related situation that warrants a risk assessment and suitable plan will be brought to a manager's attention in any one of the following ways:
- The member of staff raises a stress related issue with the manager.
 - The manager raises concerns that a member of staff may be showing signs of stress.
 - The member of staff is on sick leave with a potential stress related condition and the accompanying medical certificates confirms this e.g. - 'stress/work related stress/fatigue, nervous exhaustion/debility' (these examples are not exhaustive).
- 6.11 Staff are advised to discuss any issues of concern with their line manager in an open and honest manner in order to arrive at workable solutions. Issues of workloads and the ability to cope at work or with inter personal problems with colleagues, need to be brought to the line manager's attention in an open and honest manner. Even where the pressures experienced are not work-related, it is important that managers are made aware of them, given the potential for these matters to have an effect on work performance and impact on the working environment. Any information received by managers should be treated sensitively and in keeping with the principles associated with confidentiality.
- 6.12 In conducting risk assessments and developing associated plans, it is important that a record of the risk assessment is maintained and retained in order to monitor progress of a given stress related situation, with a view to achieving the desired positive outcome. Completed forms must be stored on the employee's electronic personal record file (e-PRF) in order that reviews of risk assessments can be undertaken as necessary. This will also provide for up to date information to be available at a given point, for case management purposes.

7 Providing support

- 7.1 Depending on the issue(s) presented, regardless of whether they are work related or not, staff and managers have recourse to specialist advice from the Wellbeing team and the Chaplaincy Services, who can provide appropriate guidance. Additionally, the Brigade has a confidential Counselling and Trauma Service (CTS), and the OHS. While managers can recommend staff be referred to CTS in the light of particular situations, CTS also operates on a self referral basis where staff can liaise directly with the service for referral as necessary. The OHS can help in providing advice in order to facilitate a return to work and support the manager in identifying workplace adjustments. Workplace adjustments can be recorded on the employee's Workplace Adjustment passport. Please see details on Hotwire how to record this here.
- 7.2 In addition to the specialist sources of advice and support mentioned above, the Brigade's Health and Safety Services (HSS) can also assist in providing guidance and support to staff and managers by offering independent help and advice concerning the risk assessment process and providing advice on best practice.

8 Recommended action

- 8.1 By managers:
- Communicate – with staff regarding workloads, standards, variations and expectations and your role in supporting them. Encourage staff to say what they think and generate their own ideas for change where possible. Listen without judging. Give constructive feedback.

- Staff Assessment – through regular one-to-ones, or through conducting a Stress Risk Assessment with the member of staff. Do not rely solely on the appraisal process, but actively manage and provide positive support for any changed situation. Consider any reasonable workplace adjustments that may be required to mitigate the risks identified.
- Support/Direction/Training – ensure that this is in place at the beginning and throughout any period of intensified workflow or new responsibilities.
- Monitor – make this a regular feature. If a manager has conducted a risk assessment, and implemented a plan, they need to ensure that this is monitored at regular intervals and be prepared to revise any working arrangements in the short term and encourage staff to develop their abilities.
- Action – Be aware of specialist sources of help and advice available as per section 9 above.

8.2 By staff:

Notwithstanding the specialist sources of assistance available to staff, there are also a number of strategies that can be adopted to alleviate the symptoms of stress and some of these include:

- Social support, i.e. family, friends and colleagues
- Professional support i.e. GP, specialist, counsellor, psychiatrist
- Support groups
- Relaxation techniques
- Physical exercise
- Good nutrition
- Adequate sleep and rest
- Life style changes
- Talking to someone
- Work based solutions

9 Records

- 9.1 Please send records by email to RecordsServices@london-fire.gov.uk. Records will be kept on your electronic personal record file (e-PRF) and retained in accordance with Policy number 788 - Electronic personal record file. Personal data shall be processed in accordance with Policy number 351 – Data protection and privacy policy.

10 Help and support

- 10.1 Please contact the Wellbeing team by email to WellbeingTeam@london-fire.gov.uk.
- 10.2 This policy may also be available on request in other alternative accessible formats as set out in Policy number 290 – Guidance note on translation and interpretation. Please contact Communications on extension 30753 and by email to communications.team@london-fire.gov.uk to discuss your needs and options.

Appendix 1 - Work related stress: guidelines

- 1 Employees have a responsibility to raise concerns with their manager (or to the next manager if appropriate) if they believe that their job or other work related factors are making them ill or contributing to their illness.
- 2 Employees have a duty to take reasonable care of their own health, safety and wellbeing and that of others who may be affected by their actions. Employees may suggest ways in which the work might be organised to alleviate the stress and discuss any other adjustments with their line manager that could be made to assist them in performing their job.
- 3 Employers have a duty of care to employees and must take reasonable care of their health, safety and wellbeing in the workplace. A referral to the Occupational Health service can be made for sickness relating to stress to ensure early support for the employee. Managers should also consider a referral to Counselling and Trauma Services in cases of work-related stress.
- 4 In situations where work has been identified as a perceived cause of stress (whether the employee is absent or not), the employee should raise it with their line manager in the first instance.
- 5 In cases where line managers may be cited as the perceived cause of stress, then they should refer the matter to the next manager outlining reasons why concerns cannot be raised with their line manager. The next manager may consider an alternative designated officer as point of contact during the period of absence but only in exceptional circumstances and where there are substantial grounds for doing so. The designated officer will undertake duties relating to contact, Employee Support Meetings or return to work interviews for as long as necessary.
- 6 The London Fire Brigade Supporting Health and Wellbeing is clearly focused on supporting employees with health concerns; and where work related stress is identified as a perceived cause of absence; managers have a responsibility to discuss the perceived cause(s) with employees with a view to eliminating (or minimising) those causes to assist a return to work or to maintain attendance. Employees should fully disclose the perceived causes of work related stress to their manager in order that the issues can be addressed without delay.
- 7 To assist with this process the "Workplace Stress Questionnaire" should be completed by employees in all cases of reported work related stress. Managers are encouraged to discuss cases of perceived work related stress with the Wellbeing team prior to meeting with the employee. If the employee's responses to the questionnaire indicate health issues, then a referral to Occupational Health should be made even if the employee has not reported sick.
- 8 Managers and employees should then meet to agree an action plan and review timeframe to monitor the impact of any agreed actions.

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------|------|--------------|-------|----------|----|----|
| EIA | 28/05/24 | SDIA | L - 24/08/23 | HSWIA | 18/10/23 | RA | NA |
|-----|----------|------|--------------|-------|----------|----|----|

Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

| Page/para nos. | Brief description of change | Date |
|---|---|------------|
| Throughout | Human Resources updated to Human Resources and Development throughout in accordance with Top Management Review. | 25/02/2011 |
| Throughout | This policy has been reviewed as current, no changes were required. | 14/01/2013 |
| Page 4 paras 8.3 and 8.4 Page 4 para 8.6 Page 5 para 8.11 Page 5 para 9.1 Page 7 – Appendix 1 | Minor substitution of words: 'stage' for 'process' and 'form for 'report'. Addition of the words 'immaterial of whether the stress is work related or not' and the sentence, 'Where a manager does not feel a risk assessment is necessary, this should be noted in the employee's return to work interview (RTW)'. Addition of the words 'requisite form for completion' and the sentence, 'Completed forms must be stored on the employee's electronic personal record file (e-PRF) in order that up to date information is available at given point, for case management purposes.' Addition of the words 'regardless of whether they are work related or not.' Deletion of the words 'Work related' at heading. | 03/05/2013 |
| Page 8 | 'Subjects list' table - template update. | 09/01/2015 |
| Page 4 onwards | New paras. 7.3, 8.4, amended para 10.2, new Appendices 1 and 2, amended Appendix 3 (formerly Appendix 1). These changes are linked to the implementation of PN252 and the accompanying Guidance). | 06/04/2016 |
| Para. 9 | Amendments to reflect Equalities function now within S&I, and change of name of ACS to C&W. Reviewed as current throughout. | 07/04/2016 |
| Page 1 | Owner title and responsible work team details changed and changes to reflect the abolition of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, now replaced with London Fire Commissioner. | 22/08/2018 |

| Page/para nos. | Brief description of change | Date |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|
| Throughout | Counselling and wellbeing updated to Counselling and Trauma Services. | 14/11/2018 |
| Page 4, para 7.3 | Reference to PN889– managing attendance policy updated to PN1005 – Supporting health and wellbeing policy. | 28/03/2023 |
| Throughout | References to supporting health and wellbeing policy provisions updated. | 23/06/2023 |
| Page 9 – 17 | Workplace stress questionnaire (appendix 1) and stress risk assessment and action plan (appendix 2) removed and Hotwire links added. | 19/09/2023 |
| Page 9 | SDIA date updated. | |
| Throughout | Minor changes made. | 25/04/2024 |
| Throughout | Wellbeing team contact details and hyperlinks updated. | 16/05/2024 |
| Page 8 | EIA date updated. | 28/05/2024 |

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Personal health | Sickness |
| Stress | |

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

| Considered by: (responsible work team) | FOIA exemption | Security marking classification |
|--|-----------------------|--|
| | | |