

**REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR - CUSTOMERS AND HUMAN
RESOURCES****EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval for a refreshed approach to employee wellbeing which aims to support employees to optimise their own health and wellbeing by developing new initiatives and creating a single intranet site for health and wellbeing information and resources.

Information and Advice

2. The new Council Plan, "Your Nottinghamshire, Your Future", has a specific commitment to ensuring people are healthier and highlights that "the lifestyle choices we make and the environment in which we live and work both have a big effect on our health and independence later in life".
3. On 26 October 2017, the Government published "Thriving at Work", the Stevenson/Farmer independent review of mental health and employers. The review was tasked at looking at how employers can better support the mental health of all employees including those with mental health problems or poor wellbeing and made recommendations about the practical steps employers can make to achieve this.
4. Improving health and wellbeing can provide a range of benefits at an individual and organisational level. This includes supporting a reduction in absence levels and increased productivity and employee engagement. Sustainable improvement can occur when individuals take personal ownership and responsibility for their own wellbeing and take advantage of the support and initiatives available to them.
5. Nottinghamshire County Council has a good track record in supporting employee health and wellbeing activities and has recently achieved the Platinum level of the Wellbeing@Work Scheme which will be presented at Committee today. The award scheme recognises forward thinking employers across Nottinghamshire who promote health and wellbeing in their workplaces. Nottinghamshire County Council is the largest employer to achieve the Platinum award. Through the scheme, the Council has recruited a network of 16 trained Workplace Champions who are committed to signposting colleagues to healthy lifestyle choices. The scheme has also provided the opportunity for the HR service to work in partnership with Public Health colleagues in publicising the activities of their commissioned services such as weight management, smoking cessation and mindfulness courses.

6. There are a significant number of existing initiatives in place which directly or indirectly support employee health and wellbeing. These include:
 - The opportunity for flexible working which aligns to the smarter working strategy
 - A revised Smokefree Policy which signifies the Council's commitment to the Declaration on Tobacco Control
 - Substance mis-use guidance
 - Domestic violence guidance
 - A range of learning opportunities including improving personal resilience, mental health awareness and pre-retirement support
 - Health and Safety policies
 - The cycle to work scheme
 - The self-managed staff support groups
 - Trade union welfare support
 - Guidance on supporting dyslexic employees
 - Guidance on supporting employees with a terminal illness which is also evidenced by the Council's signing of the Dying to Work Charter
 - Guidance on supporting employees with mental health issues developed jointly with the recognised trades unions.
7. In addition to these frameworks, the Council also provides specific wellbeing interventions through the Occupational Health Service including:
 - Access to physiotherapy
 - Eye care vouchers for display screen equipment users
 - Work station ergonomic assessments
 - Immunisation programmes for employees at risk from Hepatitis A or B
 - Flu vaccination vouchers for targeted frontline workers to protect the most vulnerable service users from contracting flu type illnesses
 - Employee counselling.

Employee counselling

8. Counselling is currently offered to Council employees where it has been assessed by managers, taking advice as necessary from their HR Business Partner, that it could be beneficial where an issue is impacting on an individual's ability to attend, remain in and/or be productive at work.
9. Prior to 2011 the Council provided an in-house self-referral service with one directly employed counsellor and sessional workers. Under this model no assessment was made of the work related impact of the referral, and the issues presented by individuals included counselling on personal issues which could be more appropriately responded to by other providers in the local community. In addition excessive waiting times occurred, often exceeding 12 weeks.
10. In June 2011 as part of service review and budget savings, the counselling service was externalised and Care First, a national leader of employee assistance programmes, was procured as a partner provider. The focus of the redesigned counselling offer was to ensure referrals were management led and concentrated on preventing work related

absence and effecting early returns to work. The most recent re-tendering process undertaken earlier in 2017 again demonstrated that Care First continue to be the most appropriate external partner in terms of cost and quality, and the Council's contract with that provider has been renewed for a further 3 years.

11. Although Care First predominantly provide individual employee counselling to this Council, they have also been utilised to provide critical incident debriefing to groups of staff affected by traumatic events, such as the tragic sudden death of a work colleague. On occasion this has been supported by access to a 24 hour counselling help line for employees and managers. These facilities are used to supplement the mainstream counselling service where appropriate.
12. The Council's service agreement with Care First ensures the employee is contacted within 24 hours of the referral for an initial telephone assessment. Provision of up to 5 further confidential face to face sessions is then arranged through their extensive network of locally based professionally qualified counsellors with direct access to suitable external venues. Alternatively, and subject to the initial clinical assessment, an employee could be referred to an online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) course.
13. Between the period 1 November 2016 and 31 October 2017, 207 direct NCC employees and 53 school based employees received counselling from Care First. The most frequent reason for referral was work related emotional health.
14. Since the current employee counselling offer was implemented there has been positive engagement by employees, managers and external customers. Regularly provided management information from Care First, continues to be used by the Council to inform an overall analysis of the outcomes of counselling inputs and their impact on:
 - preventing work related absence
 - effecting an early return to work where absence has occurred
 - improving the employee's performance at work
 - improving the employee's productivity at work.

Recent feedback from employees has included the following comments:

"After my first sessions of face to face counselling my life improved by using a thought process strategy given to me by my counsellor"

"The Care First Counsellor provided me with a high level of support and counselling which was solution focused".

Future wellbeing developments

Workplace buddying scheme

15. As part of the Council's commitment to supporting wellbeing, a number of employees have suggested that a "Buddying Scheme" could be introduced to provide support with a return to work for those employees who have had a significant period of long term absence. This would help to smooth their re-integration back into the workplace and sustain their ongoing attendance at work. It has also been suggested that this approach be developed as a mechanism to support employees to remain at work.
16. Through the scheme employees could assist and support other colleagues, on a peer basis, outside of the normal management and employment policy processes. Any scheme

put in place would be optional and as a supplement to line management, support from existing team members, family and friends and other corporate support measures such as counselling and coaching that are already in place.

17. It is envisaged that the buddying contact could be as flexible and informal as a phone call; having a cup of coffee together; helping someone make the arrangements for their return to work or greeting and supporting a colleague on their first day back or helping someone discuss issues at work or possibly take the form of focus groups with staff. Clearly individual employees will have differing needs and circumstances and may wish to access the support available in different ways.
18. Trades union colleagues have suggested that this approach could be supported by referrals to the counselling service where appropriate.
19. In order to assess the merits of a scheme and most effective way to support people, an employee survey was undertaken between 12 October and 27 October which elicited 99 responses. 35% of the respondents stated they had personally experienced a period of significant long term absence and 23% had managed a member of staff who had experienced a significant period of absence. Of the 99 respondents, 13% thought it would help an employee to return to work earlier. More than half (65.66%) thought this kind of support would help staff to get up to speed and be more effective sooner on return to work after a long term absence. 15% thought it would assist them in remaining effective at work for longer.
20. A number of respondents also volunteered to take part in focus groups to help design how a Buddying Scheme could be implemented. These focus groups will occur during November with the aim of establishing the scheme early in the new year.

Workplace chaplaincy service

21. It is also proposed to establish a workplace chaplaincy service on a pilot basis on the West Bridgford campus. The Nottingham workplace chaplaincy service visits people in their place of work to offer friendship and to listen to any personal issues an employee may not wish to share with their manager or colleagues. Their support is non-judgemental, independent and confidential. The service will be for all employees whatever their beliefs and circumstances and does not promote any particular faith. Feedback from other organisations who have implemented similar schemes is that some employees prefer to speak to “a person of faith” regardless of the particular faith.
22. This provision will be advertised on the intranet and employees will be able to choose whether to take up this up or not.

Refreshed employee wellbeing intranet site

23. In order to brigade the initiatives and resources detailed above into a “one-stop shop” a new employee wellbeing intranet site has been developed to encourage and support our employees to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In addition to grouping together the resources the Council can offer, the new site will also signpost employees to the latest advice from the NHS and other specialist organisations such as MIND and MacMillan on all aspects of keeping physically and mentally healthy. The site will host details about learning

opportunities, national health campaigns and activities co-ordinated by the Workplace Champions. The site will also feature a link to the “Nottinghamshire Help Yourself” site which will enable employees to search for wellbeing activities in their local home areas.

24. It is recognised that the development of the employee wellbeing site will be an iterative process and will be informed by employee feedback. To this end, it is intended to undertake a survey 3 months after the site has been launched which will also seek to capture further cost-effective ideas to expand the Council’s employee wellbeing offer. The revised action plan and any new initiatives will be the subject of a future report to Personnel Committee.

“Thriving at Work”, the Stevenson/Farmer independent review into workplace mental health

25. As mentioned earlier, this recent review has looked at how employers can better support all employees including those with poor mental health or wellbeing remain in and thrive at work. The review draws on the accounts of over 200 employers of people with mental health problems and leading experts in mental health and work, and recommends all employers commit to its stated principles and standards. These cover mental health at work plans, mental health awareness for employees, line management responsibilities and routine monitoring of mental health and wellbeing.
26. It is proposed that the Council considers the detail of the recommendations and the corporate employee health and wellbeing action plan is updated in light of any additional actions required. A further report will be brought back to Personnel Committee with proposals about how these will be implemented.

Other Options Considered

27. It is considered important to ensure the Council’s wellbeing provision is easily accessible and promoted on one recognised site, and that further opportunities to improve the provision are explored. No other options were considered.

Reason for Recommendations

28. The Council is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of its employees at work and recognises that the focus should be on the provision of resources for employees to take personal responsibility to achieve this. By creating a new employee wellbeing site, the Council will provide a recognised hub to house these resources.

Statutory and Policy Implications

29. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

30. There is no specific data contained in the report which identifies any individual or group of individuals.

Human Resources Implications

31. The human resource implications are implicit within the body of the report and highlight the Council's commitment to employee health and wellbeing. The Trade Unions have been consulted and are supportive of work in this area.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

32. Consideration is being given to ensuring the revised intranet wellbeing content is accessible to the Council's workforce.

Smarter Working Implications

33. Presenting employee information on the revised intranet platform is in keeping with the drive for smarter working.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 1) Agree the implementation of the new employee health and wellbeing initiatives detailed in the report and the intranet site presented to Personnel Committee.
- 2) Receive the Platinum Wellbeing@Work Award.
- 3) Receive a further report on the implementation of the Stevenson/Farmer report recommendations.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 14/11/17)

34. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Personnel Committee.

Financial Comments (RWK 08/11/17)

35. There are no specific financial implications arising from the report.

HR Comments (GE 16/11/17)

36. The HR implications are contained in the body of the report and demonstrate the Council's commitment to the health and wellbeing of its workforce.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All