

**REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMERS AND HUMAN
RESOURCES
WORKPLACE BUDDY SCHEME****Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Members on the development and implementation of the Workplace Buddy Scheme and to seek agreement to the ongoing roll out of the scheme.

Information

2. The County Council is a Platinum Wellbeing at Work award winner with a comprehensive Wellbeing Action Plan and supporting programme of work. The focus of this is to support employees to remain healthy whilst at work and to be able to return to work as soon as possible after a period of absence and able to perform well whilst at work.
3. Members are also aware that, in common with many other employers, stress and depression is the most significant reason for absence across the Council and that the Council has in place a range of initiatives to try to improve the resilience of employees.
4. In April the Council relaunched its package of support measures for employees via a new page on the Council's intranet. This has been developed with support from Public Health colleagues and includes advice, signposting and access to services and activities in relation to diet, fitness, dealing with cancer and terminal illness, smoking cessation and a range of measures to support employees experiencing and to prevent stress or mental ill health. The focus is on self-service and access to activities where possible.
5. One of the new initiatives is a Workplace Buddy Scheme. This scheme was developed following a staff survey and focus groups to ascertain what activities employees would find most helpful in preventing them suffering from stress or becoming depressed and help them to remain at or return to work if absent.
6. The scheme is an entirely voluntary, informal support scheme provided for employees by other employees to provide a "listening ear" and opportunity to have a coffee and a chat with a colleague. A network of volunteer "buddies" will be available and promoted via the intranet, team talk and through team meetings. Buddies can discuss potential issues and problems with colleagues and listen to how they are feeling with a view to preventing issues becoming significant enough to lead to ill health. Employees and buddies will decide whether this is best done face to face, by email or telephone.

7. Employees have said that they would also find the buddy role helpful to offer additional support during absence and to enable them to return to work after long term absence and remain fit enough to be able to attend work.
8. The Buddying scheme is in addition to day to day managerial support for employees and through the formal supervision and Employee Performance and Development (EPDR) process as it is recognised that employees may feel more able to share some issues and concerns with a colleague on an informal basis than their line manager.
9. This informal Buddying scheme fits into the Council's overall wellbeing support package which also includes coaching from a network of trained and qualified coaches; access to external NHS wellbeing services and the Council's formal Counselling Service provided by an external provider.
10. In response to the recommendations of the Stevenson-Farmer Report the Council is also working with the recognised trades unions to develop proposals for Mental Health First Aiders to further support employees. The initial thoughts are that the Council's network of employee Health and Wellbeing Champions will be developed and extended to take on this specific role which will include initial support and signposting colleagues to access professional support services where necessary. Further training will be provided to current and future Wellbeing Champions to enable them to take on this additional role. This will be the subject of further reports to Personnel Committee as the work is progressed.
11. A report will be brought back to Personnel Committee after six months operation of the Buddying scheme to identify learning and any adjustments required to encourage take up by employees. This will include feedback from buddies and employees who have used the scheme and the development of case studies to further promote the scheme.

Other Options Considered

12. The Council has developed a comprehensive support package for employees over a number of years. It was felt that the more informal buddying approach would provide employees with choice and complement the existing provisions. Take up of the scheme and feedback will be monitored as far as possible, whilst maintaining confidentiality, in order to try to measure the impact of the implementation of the new scheme.

Reasons for Recommendations

13. The Council facilitates and encourages employees to access a range of activities and initiatives to support them to become more resilient and to respond to and manage difficult issues and problems which may arise both inside and outside of work with the aim of preventing ill health and supporting employees to remain effective at work.
14. The Workplace Buddy Scheme complements more formal provisions with its network of volunteer buddies which it is hoped employees will find more accessible than a formal referral process to professional external providers of services such as counselling. Employees may also feel that there is less likelihood of being judged or stigmatised for speaking to a colleague rather than accessing professional support services. However, if in talking to a buddy it becomes apparent that a more in-depth intervention from a mental

health professional is required, buddies will be advised to signpost colleagues to alternative provisions and employees supported to take these up.

Statutory and Policy Implications

15. 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

16. Access to the scheme will be voluntary and issues discussed confidential between the buddy and employee. The exception would be if a significant potential risk was identified in which case, appropriate professional advice would be taken and the employee encouraged and supported to seek professional help.

Human Resources Implications

17. These are set out in the body of the report. The Workplace Buddy Scheme has been discussed with the recognised trades unions and will form part of the Council's overall support package for employees. Trades union colleagues support the development and provision of this role and are keen for staff to be encouraged and enabled to volunteer and undertake the role without it impacting negatively on their own workloads.

Public Sector Equality Duty implications

18. Volunteer Buddies will be from across the workforce, including employees with protected characteristics. The scheme will be available to all employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members:

- 1) Welcome the implementation off the Workplace Buddy Scheme and support the ongoing roll out of the scheme.
- 2) Agree to receive a further progress report and feedback from the initial implementation to inform future actions in six months' time.

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For any enquiries about this report please contact: Gill Elder, Group Manager at gill.elder@nottsc.gov.uk or on 0115 9773867

Constitutional Comments (KK 10/05/18)

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

Financial Comments (SES 11/05/18)

20. There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Human Resources Comments (GE 11/5/18)

21. The scheme has been developed following discussions with employees and trades union colleagues to complement existing provisions to prevent ill health and support employees to remain resilient and effective at work.

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