

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Finance and Resources Committee

approval noting

Ref FW/HL Date 18 Sept 2019

Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy

From Fiona Whittaker, Head of People and Organisational Development

Email LiddleH@northlan.gov.uk **Telephone** 01698 520629

Executive Summary

Mental ill health is the leading cause of sickness absence in North Lanarkshire Council and all other major organisations. This report presents the Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy, developed by a cross organisational group including our trade union partners.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee:

1. Approve the new Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy
2. Note the intention to develop additional supports, as outlined in paragraph 2.3.
3. Otherwise note the contents of this report

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Improve the council's resource base
Ambition Statement	Build a workforce for the future, capable of delivering on our shared priorities and ambition.

1. Background

- 1.1 Mental ill health and stress conditions are one of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society. In North Lanarkshire Council, sickness absence relating to mental health related conditions currently account for around 30% of all absences. Indeed, it has been the top reason for absence for approximately four years.
- 1.2 Although the Council offers a range of training materials to support mental health and has been providing access to employee counselling for more than ten years, a formal request was made by Unison for the Council to consider the development of a policy or strategy to support mental health awareness in the workplace. A working group, consisting of People & Organisational Development colleagues, managers from across a range of services and representatives from teaching and non-teaching trade unions was established to discuss the development of the Strategy and ideas for other support mechanisms. The diverse membership of the working group has ensured that our approach fits well with other work underway, particularly within the teaching environment and in Health & Social Care.
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2. Report

- 2.1 The early discussions of the working group focused on the key issues associated with mental health in the workplace and what the Council's priorities should be. It was clear that our approach needs to be about much more than the Strategy, and needs to focus on how we equip managers to talk about mental health, and how we raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of mental ill health, before it becomes a problem.
- 2.2 The Strategy (attached at Appendix One) is applicable to all employees and sets out the Council's commitment to promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. It sits alongside the Managing Attendance Policy (currently under review) and demonstrates the Council's intention to strengthen the positive factors of employment – such as support and development – and provide opportunities to manage stress and build resilience in the workforce.
- 2.3 It is recognised that the Strategy is only the starting point in the work which the Council needs to do to support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Other ideas under consideration, include:
- Development of a training programme for line managers. Training will focus on helping managers to feel more confident in speaking to their team about mental ill health. It is important to note that the intention is not to turn managers into counsellors, but recognise that support from a line manager at an early stage can help employees find the assistance needed.
 - Review and refresh of existing training materials, available to all employees.
 - Consideration of the use of Mental Health First Aiders. A Mental Health First Aider in the workplace is the go-to person for anyone who is going through some form of mental health issue. The first aider will be present to help guide the person in distress to the relevant help that they need. They will also have the relevant knowledge to be able to spot someone who is developing a mental health issue. They will, therefore, be able to intervene before it escalates.

- Review of the Council's stress risk assessment process to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
 - Review and provide information on mental health support during the recruitment process.
 - Leverage the use of NL Life to ensure that employees have access to a wide range of resources to support mental health. There are many excellent resources now being made available in North Lanarkshire, such as those encompassed within the new Mental Health Strategy in development by NHS Lanarkshire.
 - The Council will ensure that all employees are signposted to the full range of available support both within the Council and more widely including materials provided by our occupational health provider.
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3. Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

There are no Fairer Scotland implications.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

The Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy has been subject to the Equality Impact Assessment process.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

There are no direct financial implications. However, any action which helps reduce sickness absence linked to mental ill health will attract financial savings.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

The Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy will be published in line with Council policy and procedures.

4.3 Environmental Impact

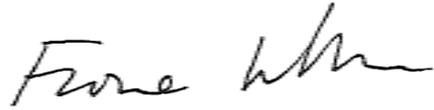
There are no environmental impacts.

4.4 Risk Impact

The ongoing risk relates to increasing incidence of sickness absence relating to mental ill health. While the Strategy in itself does not guarantee a reduction in such absences, it is hoped that a preventative approach will have a positive impact on sickness absence levels.

5. Measures of success

- 5.1 The Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy will set out the Council's commitment to addressing workplace mental health and wellbeing issues, promote the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems, and support them once they are at work.
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Fiona Whittaker
Head of People & Organisational Development

Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy

Author	<i>Heather Liddle</i>	Contact	<i>liddleh@northlan.gov.uk</i>
Owner	<i>Fiona Whittaker</i>	details	<i>whittakerf@northlan.gov.uk</i>

Date		Version number	1	Document status	
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Governance Committee		Date approved	
Review date			

Strategic Alignment

Improving the Council's Resource Base – (23) Build a workforce for the future capable of delivering on our priorities and shared ambition

Consultation process	<i>Strategy developed by joint stakeholders</i>	
Stakeholders	Contacts identified for each service	
	<i>Joint Trade Unions</i> <i>JNC for Teaching Staff</i> <i>Employee Equality Forum</i>	
Distribution		

Change record

Date	Author
Change made	

1. Introduction

North Lanarkshire Council acknowledges that mental ill health and stress can be associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society. Promoting and protecting the mental wellbeing of our workforce is important for individuals' physical health, social wellbeing and productivity. Mental wellbeing in the workplace is relevant to all employees and everyone can contribute to improved mental wellbeing at work.

As an employer, the Council has for many years promoted positive mental health and wellbeing, with employee counselling services made available to all employees at all levels. It is recognised however that more can and must be done, given the known increase in incidence of mental health issues within our own workforce and in society as a whole.

Addressing workplace mental health and wellbeing can help strengthen the positive, protective factors of employment, reducing risk factors for mental ill health and improving general health. It can also help promote the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems, and support them once they are at work.

Important aspects of our mental health and wellbeing include providing information and raising awareness, promoting preventative and self-management techniques, fostering management skills to deal with issues around mental health and stress effectively, developing a supportive workplace culture, providing stress management and resilience building skills for employees, offering assistance, advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem or returning to work after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

2. Scope:

This strategy applies to all North Lanarkshire Council employees.

3. Direction Statement:

The Council is committed to the protection and promotion of the mental health and wellbeing of all employees.

The Council shall continuously strive, as far as is reasonably practicable, to promote mental health throughout the organisation by establishing and maintaining processes that enhance mental health and wellbeing.

4. The Legal Position

Under the Equality Act (2010) it is illegal to discriminate directly or indirectly against a person who considers themselves to be disabled. You also cannot discriminate against anyone because of an association with a disability, for example, an employee who cares for a disabled relative. A disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a long term, adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities.

Under this legislation, employees experiencing ongoing poor mental health may be considered to have a disability. As an employer, we must therefore ensure that any employee

who considers themselves to be disabled is treated fairly and, where appropriate, that we make reasonable adjustments to enable them to do their job to the best of their ability.

5. Definitions

“Mental Health influences how we think and feel about ourselves and others and how we interpret events. It affects our capacity to learn, to communicate and to form, sustain and end relationships. It influences our ability to cope with change, transition and life events.”
(Scotland’s Healthy Working Lives Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy & Guidance)

For the purposes of this strategy the following terms will be used:

Mental health – we all have mental health. This is an umbrella term which refers to a range from positive mental health to poor mental health. This can be mild to moderate or more serious, severe and enduring. Your mental health doesn’t stay the same. It can fluctuate as circumstances change and as you move through different stages in your life.

Mental health problem – a term that refers to symptoms that meet the criteria for clinical diagnosis of a defined mental health condition – for example, depression or anxiety. However, a diagnosis isn’t required to have a mental health problem.

We may find these early warning signs of a problem hard to see in ourselves, and it can help to have colleagues who can help us connect this to our mental health.

Wellbeing – a term that includes life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing – for example, having a sense of control, purpose in life, a sense of belonging and positive relationships with others. Being comfortable, happy or healthy.

Resilience – a term that refers to the ability to function well under pressure, adapt to changing demands and recover (quickly) from the impact of difficult situations. Like mental health, resilience can fluctuate over time. It can be strengthened through a set of learnable skills.

6. Strategy Objectives

(i) **To develop a supportive culture, build resilience and address factors that may negatively affect mental wellbeing, and to develop management skills.**

Associated actions:

- Reduce discrimination and stigma by increasing awareness and understanding of mental health problems
- Give employees information on and increase their awareness of mental wellbeing
- Include information about the mental health and wellbeing strategy in the staff induction programme.

- Provide training for designated staff in the early identification, causes and appropriate management of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, stress and change management.

(ii) To support employees to minimise the risk of mental ill health by providing information on how to control stress, increase resilience and to boost low self-esteem as a way to help keep symptoms under control.

Associated actions:

- Provide opportunities for employees to look after their mental wellbeing, for example through physical activity, stress reducing activities and social events.
- Provide systems that encourage predictable working hours, reasonable workloads and flexible working practices where appropriate.
- Establish good two-way communication to ensure staff involvement, particularly during periods of organisational change.
- Promote and support opportunities to enhance professional development, identified through Performance Review & Development (PRD).

(iii) To provide support for employees experiencing mental health difficulties.

Associated actions:

- Ensure individuals suffering from mental health problems are treated fairly and consistently.
- Manage return to work for those who have experienced mental health problems and in cases of long-term sickness absence, put in place, where possible, a phased return to work.
- Ensure employees are aware of the support that can be offered through occupational health, Time for Talking or alternatively their own GP, or a counsellor.
- Treat all matters relating to individual employees and their mental health problems in the strictest confidence and share on a 'need to know' basis only with consent from the individual concerned.

(iv) To encourage the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems.

Associated actions:

- Show a positive and enabling attitude to employees and job applicants with mental health issues. This includes having positive statements in recruitment literature.

- Ensure that all staff involved in recruitment and selection are briefed on mental health issues and are trained in appropriate interview skills.
- Ensure all line managers have information and training about managing mental health in the workplace.

(v) To recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue.

Associated actions:

- Adopt the principles of the HSE Stress Management Standards for employees.
- Consult with trade union safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide training in good management practices
- Provide confidential counselling and adequate resources.
- Align with other relevant policies such as the Alcohol & Drugs Policy, Smarter Working Policy and Managing Attendance.

7. Responsibilities

The Council

- Promote and support positive mental health and wellbeing for all employees.
- Ensure that managers have the necessary training and guidance to appropriately respond to employees presenting with poor mental health and/or confidential disclosures of a mental health diagnosis.
- Build a culture that tackles mental health stigma, discrimination and harassment.
- Develop a culture that breaks the silence around mental health.
- Provide access to a range of appropriate support mechanisms.

Managers

- Lead by example, promoting positive working practices.
- Undertake appropriate, relevant training to ensure a good understanding of mental health issues and appropriate management practices.
- Be understanding, sensitive and available to employees who wish to discuss or disclose information about their mental health.
- Understand the early signs of poor mental health. Where there are concerns, discuss with the employee quickly and sensitively to enable the offer of proactive support to be accessed at an early stage.
- Empower employees by making them aware of the supports available, including training and development opportunities.

- Encourage a culture that prevents stigma, discrimination or harassment around the subject of mental health and to employees who may be struggling with poor mental health.
- Provide a safe work environment where employees can discuss mental health, individually or in teams.
- Support employees before, during and after returning to work following a period of absence due to poor mental health.

Employees

- Be aware of their own mental health and wellbeing, and how to stay healthy.
- Recognise the importance of mental health and wellbeing and its impact on resilience.
- Support a culture where mental wellbeing is valued and promoted and **where** mental health stigma, discrimination or harassment linked to mental health is not tolerated.
- Support their colleagues when they want to discuss their own mental health concerns.
- If concerned about their mental health, speak to their line manager, People & Organisational Development, trade union or employee forum representative.

8. Communication

All employees will be made aware of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the support available.

Regular updates will be provided to all employees.

9. Review and monitoring

The strategy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.