

Mental Health Update

Date: 16 October 2023

Report of: Chief HR Officer

Report to: Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief Summary

The report provides an update regarding the current position in relation to our management of employee mental health and the support we offer to managers and employees in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

Supporting good mental health is a key priority for the council and we are working hard to adopt good wellbeing practices. We want to create a healthy and resilient culture that enables our colleagues to work to their strengths. We can achieve this with focus on engagement, a clear framework and our BYB programme.

Like many responsible organisations we are mindful of how we can continue to support colleagues in a post pandemic world, to help them navigate personal challenges and encourage positive mental health, whilst creating a psychologically safe workplace that is committed to managing safe levels of work-related stress.

We are also aware of the effect poor wellbeing and mental health absence has on our ability to deliver our services and operate in an effective way. Navigating this requires fair and clear policy and procedure that supports colleagues to be their best, and the council to achieve its business needs.

Over recent years good progress has been made with our #BeWell brand to encourage positive mental health and ownership, with a strong offering to support employees who are experiencing personal mental health challenges. We recognise that if we are to fully support employee mental health, we must continue to mature and focus on some key areas such as minimising work-related stress and developing a stress aware and compassionate culture across the council. In turn this will bring to life our values, behaviours, and people strategy.

The targeted interventions involved:

- 1. Setting a clear policy, framework, and management system.**
- 2. Continue talking, learning, and leading.**
- 3. Corporate Support.**
- 4. Data Capture and Reporting.**
- 5. Building Manager Capability.**
- 6. Managing absence and performance.**

Recommendations

Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board is asked to:

- a) Note the content of the report and the ongoing work and progress to promote positive mental health and manage work-related stress, including the further development of the #teamleedsbewell offer.
- b) Identify any actions arising from scrutiny's consideration of this report.

What is this report about?

- 1 The report provides an update regarding the current position in relation to workforce mental health management and support. This includes an overview of the meaning of mental health and its position within the wellbeing framework, our new approach to a more tangible and joined-up health, safety and wellbeing approach, an overview of the mental health trends across the Council, recognition of priority service, and the next steps in our journey including a 2023-25 action plan.

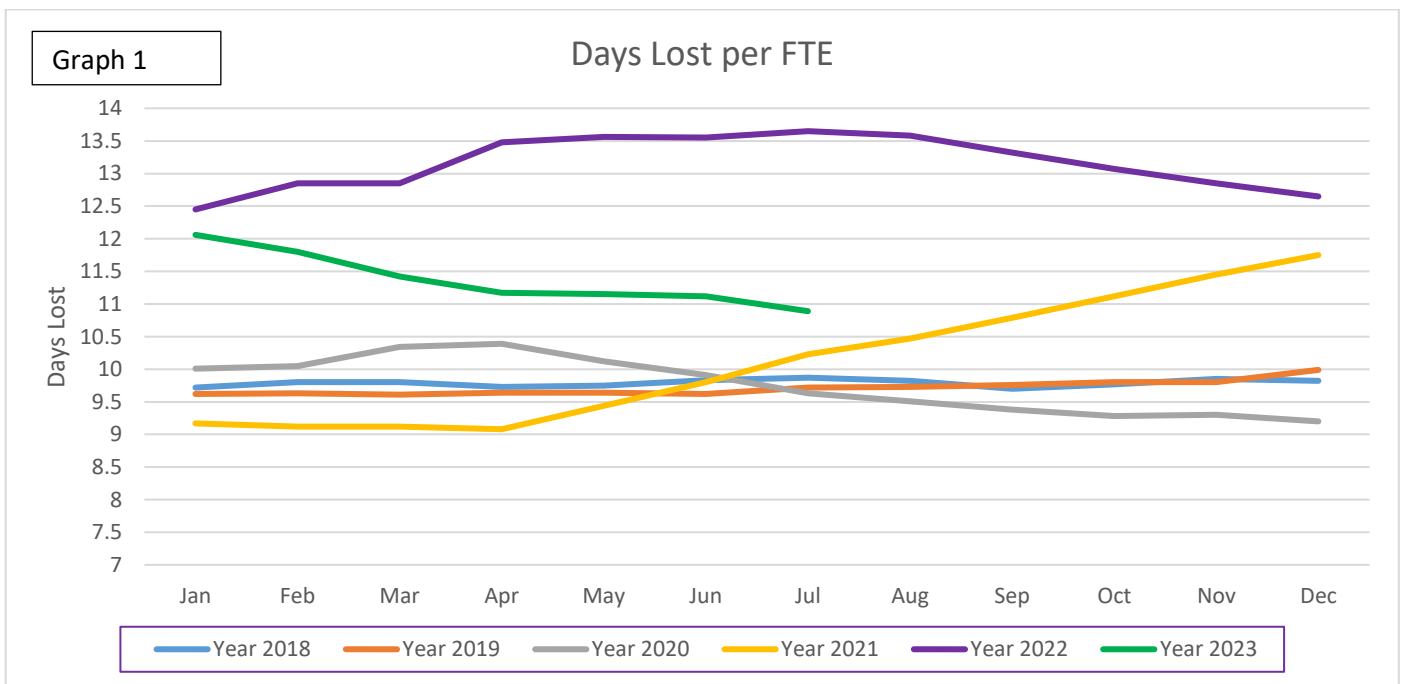
What impact will this proposal have?

- 2 This item will allow further scrutiny of the Council's approach to managing colleague mental health and supporting the health and wellbeing of our workforce. This work also contributes to the recommendations made in the Peer Challenge in relation to supporting staff health and wellbeing particularly in relation to workload pressures which continue to be raised as an issue by staff (most recent staff survey data).
- 3 Unfortunately, even before the global pandemic, UK workplaces were facing a significant mental health challenge at work, and now post-pandemic, absences due to unhappiness/stress/anxiety/depression are rising.
- 4 Managing mental health is a key priority for the organisation as we have seen an increase in sickness absence since the pandemic. Initially this was due to Covid, temporary changes in our approach to managing attendance, the on-going effects of Covid and then high instances of other infections and increasing reports of mental health related illness. This picture largely mirrors the position in other large and peer group organisations.
- 5 Leeds City Council figures reflect this upward trend and whilst workforce survey results have been generally encouraging, increased pressure and demanding workloads has consistently come out as a theme causing concern among the workforce (highlighted in the 2023 staff engagement survey as an area of worsening concern and highlighted in subsequent wellbeing pulse surveys). This theme was also reflected in the recent LGA Peer Review Report.
 - Leeds City Council's significant and ongoing workforce financial challenges mean that creating an environment and culture where people don't feel pressured is a key consideration when creating a positive mental health and stress culture.
 - Improving levels of attendance to create additional capacity and productivity is one of the key proposals identified to help tackle the Council's significant financial challenges. A 10% reduction in absence would mean a productivity boost with over 18,000 more days worked. To truly improve absence rates, we must understand our absence culture.
 - With absences due to poor mental health rising, it is critical that further action is taken now, particularly in the areas that need it most and where absence is the highest. Each of our five directors have chosen mental health and wellbeing as one of their key Health and Safety in

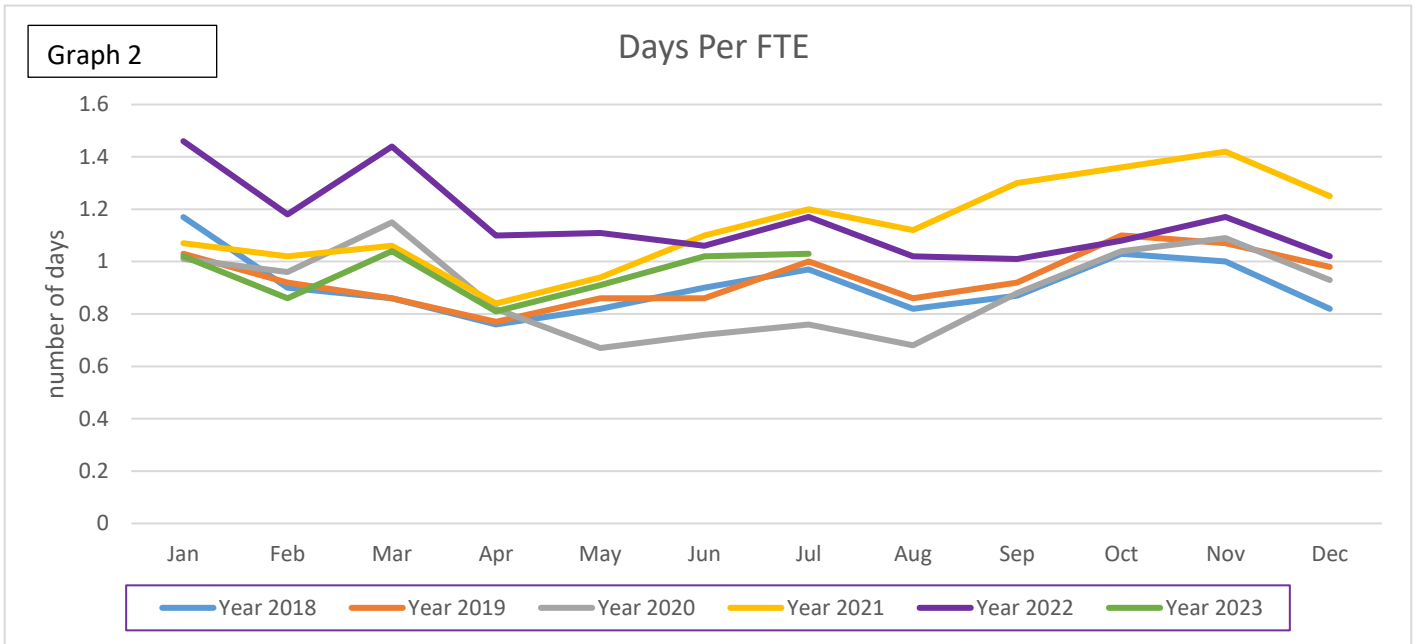
the Workplace (HSW) priorities for 2023/24. Acting around workplace mental health means that problems can be addressed early or prevented before they even arise. This work can also support colleagues that are experiencing difficulties to make a faster and smoother transition back to work after being absent, thereby reducing absence costs and increasing productivity.

Overview of ill-mental health absence levels across the Council

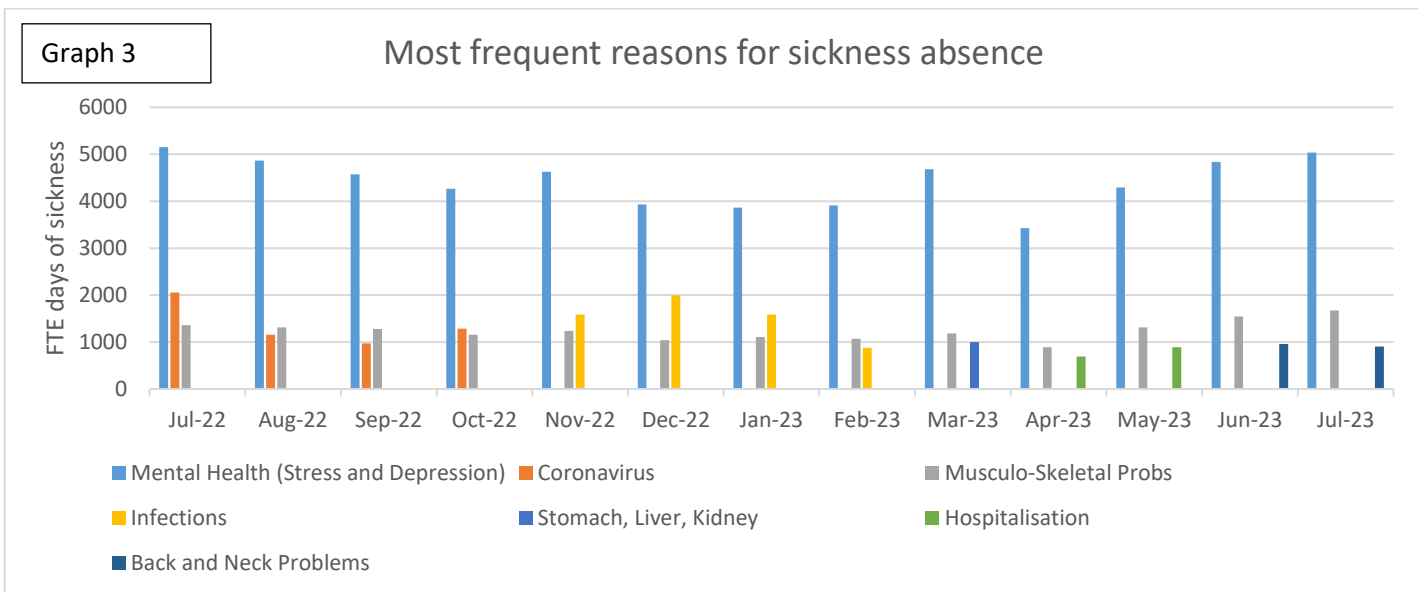
- 6 Graph 1 shows the total number of days lost per FTE month by month for each of the last six calendar years. For the year 2023, the days lost per FTE has decreased steadily.
- 7 It also shows that we have not returned to normal sickness levels that we experienced in 2018 prior to the pandemic where sickness in July 2018 was recorded at 9.87 compared to current levels of 10.89 days lost per FTE.



- 8 Graph 2 shows the number of sick days per FTE by month for each of the last six calendar years. The year 2022 had the highest number of days in comparison to the previous year's however, this has declined from July 2022. In July 2023, this has now dropped lower than the years 2021 and 2022 and is only 0.03 higher than July 2019 and 0.06 higher than July 2018. It is still significantly higher than July 2020 although this was an anomaly year due to the impact of Covid.



9 Graph 3 shows a view of the most recent top three categories of sickness across the council. Mental Health (Stress and Depression) has been the top reason for sickness with a peak in July 2022 of 5148.52 FTE days. It had steadily decreased until April 2023. However, it has increased again from May reaching its second highest in 12 months at 5033.32 in July 2023.



Note: Mental Health covers an extensive list of sickness reasons that includes but is not exclusive to Acute Stress, Depression, Addiction, Eating disorder, Nervous debility, post-natal depression, Panic attacks and Dementia.

Main Interventions: Setting a clear policy, framework, and risk management system.

10 The corporate work-related stress policy will be reviewed in 2024. This work will provide clearer leadership commitment, roles and responsibilities and arrangements to support and manage poor mental health, captured by reporting, trend analysis and supported by service level Safety, Health, and Wellbeing improvement plans.

11 The corporate Mental Health and Wellbeing team will complete an organisational and service level work-related stress risk assessment as required under the Management of Health and

Safety Workplace Regulations 1999. This work will identify key workplace factors that contribute to poor mental health, unhappiness, poor staff retention and high absence, such as unmanaged instances of violence and aggression.

- 12 Mental health and wellbeing are key elements under the new risk assessment approach that incorporates person, place, and activity. This will enable better focus on wellbeing and mental health throughout the council.
- 13 The HSW framework will see an increase in the number of in-service HSW Officers, with high-risk services as a priority. This will increase focus and energy around HSW, guide managers, support compliance and drive change within teams.

Main Interventions: Continue talking, learning, and leading.

Leading with focus

- 14 Continue to have trusted and open conversations at all levels of the council leadership. To **promote** and increase mental health awareness and considerations amongst decision makers and to engender healthier ways of working and **prevent** unnecessary work-related stress.
- 15 Regular HSW updates and discussions with CLT and directorate leadership teams to understand risk factors across the organisation and ensure an appropriate improvement strategy is implemented.
- 16 Our "#TeamLeedsBeWell" wellbeing brand is becoming increasingly recognised across the organisation and provides a wealth of information and guidance to support both managers and individuals with all wellbeing needs. Over recent months two of the Extended BCLT sessions have dedicated time to further develop the offer, helping raise awareness and increase visibility of all the support available. The focus has been to ensure leaders are supported, engaged, and well informed to support their teams.

Increasing service level and manager capability

- 17 The launch last year of the Be Your Best leadership and management development offer has enabled us to build capability, confidence, and support for managers in managing staff wellbeing and ill-health.
- 18 HSW, HR, and Occupational Health (OH) Business Partners (BPs) are now working together to provide more targeted service level support. This approach enables the join up of key elements such as absence, staff turnover, accidents, violence and aggression, reasons for referrals and HR cases to create a clear picture. This collaboration improves manager and employee support.
- 19 We are now ready to introduce the corporate wellbeing and mental health toolkit to help services promote, prevent, and support mental health at team level. To help us get our next steps right and enable service areas to build a bespoke toolkit we will review our existing offering and adapt where necessary. This will include a review of but is not limited to: "Be Your Best" core management training programmes, flexibly delivered let's talk sessions on a range of topics including stress, our "supporting staff at work" package and specific health-related sessions, "listening ear" sessions facilitated by our team of Mental Health First Aiders.

20 Whilst we continue to promote the offer, it is recognised that the #TeamLeedsBeWell offer is not embedded across all parts of our frontline workforce. We believe this will improve when in-service HSW Officers are in place and the toolkit is accessed.

Encourage stakeholder collaboration

21 Continue to join up key areas of the council like Public Health, Active Leeds and specialist service teams in Adults and Health so that we make the most of internal expertise and co-design practical solutions that will make a real difference in teams.

22 We will continue to undertake further benchmarking and good practice analysis, working with partner and Anchor organisations on city-wide wellbeing initiatives, including those relating to the emerging Fair Work Charter. The Fair Work Charter is a West Yorkshire Mayor led initiative; more information will follow once the framework is available.

23 Working in partnership with local GPs to establish a 360 perspective and support network to actively support employees and work collaboratively to keep employees healthy, happy and in work.

Main Interventions: Continue supporting staff

24 We continue to maintain our status as an active Mindful Employer and regularly share good practice with other organisations across the region including third sector partners. Our internal Healthy Minds Group is very active and our hundreds of workplace-Mental Health First Aiders continue to offer vital support to those that need it. This year we will unify our mental health first aiders and wellbeing champion community to maximise effectiveness and bring together as an additional resource. We're keen to expand the role to help us keep talking to colleagues who are absent from work due to poor mental health, stress, and anxiety.

25 We also continues to support employees around many pertinent wellbeing issues including financial wellbeing, menopause, and bereavement. For example, we had our Money Awareness Week on 17th to 21st April 2023. We recognise that the cost-of-living crisis is affecting everybody and can have a significant impact on individual wellbeing. We have continued to commit to paying the Real Living Wage with effect from the 1st April 2023 of £10.90. In addition, last year we launched a new Staff Benefits Portal/App that enabled staff to access a range of salary sacrifice schemes, retail discounts and easy access to a wealth of guidance to help staff spend money wisely.

26 The Staff Survey is also an important opportunity to assess the wellbeing of our workforce, with the results helping us to identify priority areas and resource focus for the coming year.

27 We recognise that the occupational health team is small and as a result must focus on the most urgent cases. Work is being done at a leadership level to develop a vision for this team that matches the council portfolio and begin to work more proactively. Our occupational health team continue to promote good health, proactively prevent poor health, and support employees, managers, and HR colleagues across service areas.

28 Our employee support offer (Viv up) continues to provide telephone and face to face guidance and counselling for colleagues in need. This is a popular support mechanism to many colleagues and as a result we have increased on-site counselling to two days per week.

Main Intervention: Managing absence and performance

- 29 We use an occupational health referral system so, when it is needed, employees can get the support they require. A quick turnaround and correct reporting can help prevent unnecessary absence and provide valuable support.
- 30 Our absence management policy and procedures led and supported by HR BPs ensure managers can navigate employee absence reasonably and fairly, balancing both employee wellbeing and organisational needs. Our support, response, and relationship with colleagues when they are off sick due to ill-mental health has a direct impact upon their condition, they're recovery and the likelihood that they will return to work. This relationship can cause stress and anxiety, because of this our process management needs to be considerate, compassionate, and flexible. Ensuring managers are confident and competent to navigate this process mindfully is a priority for us. As a result, we will be reviewing how we manage our longer-term sick cases compassionately and how we respond to shorter term absence for stress and anxiety.
- 31 It is important to consider our absence culture and the behavioural patterns our employees display. Like many organisations we must reflect upon the possibility that some employees may abuse stress/anxiety sick leave because by its very nature it is difficult to diagnose.

Main Interventions: Data Capture and Reporting

- 32 Over the last year mental and emotional ill-health has been the main reason for sickness absence. Mental Health covers an extensive list of sickness reasons that includes but is not exclusive to acute stress, depression, addiction, eating disorder, nervous debility, post-natal depression, panic attacks and dementia.
- 33 We aim to improve our data capture and reporting pathways to aid more mindful, risk-based decision-making around how we approach mental health and wellbeing. This work will enable us to identify relationships between key factors and deliver a tailored and energised effort to make a difference in priority areas.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 1 The interventions and support offer detailed in this report enable key elements of the People Strategy particularly, 'Being Our Best – you are supported to be well at work' but extends across manager expectations and strengthening our organisational culture and values by providing holistic health and wellbeing programmes.
- 2 This will therefore support and enable the delivery of the Organisational Plan and Best City Ambitions.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 3 Consultation and engagement are ongoing with the Chief Executive, CLT, BCLT, Extended BCLT, Cabinet and Lead Member for Resources regarding the actions and initiatives taking place. Wider socialisation will begin after the report has undergone scrutiny amongst trade union colleagues, heads of service and other relevant groups.

What are the resource implications?

- 4 There are no specific resource implications contained in this report. However, delivery requires the on-going input from managers and the corporate HSW team to provide support, develop interventions and promote Health and Wellbeing initiatives from existing resource.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 5 The risk to the organisation of increased levels of sickness absence, is the lost productivity and potential increased costs where services need to secure additional cover to maintain service delivery. There is also a potential risk that staff in work then experience additional pressure if the capacity in the team is reduced.
- 6 This report details the response to reducing the current levels of absence which will mitigate the above-mentioned risks.

What are the legal implications?

- 7 Failure to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and all consequent regulation.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 8 Various options are being considered in relation to our response to managing mental health as detailed within the report. Mental health and wellbeing are multifaceted and therefore require a range of interventions which we will continue to develop to respond to matters that are impacting on attendance, performance, and employee health.

How will success be measured?

- 9 Success will be measured through the monitoring of the key data sources including 1) managing attendance data that records details in terms of the level of sickness across the Council, including any trends and patterns 2) access to mental health first aiders 3) reasons for occupational health referrals 4) use of Vivup employee support 5) service level HSW plans and risk ratings.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 10 Managing mental health and wellbeing is an on-going process that will always be in place. The intensive support that is currently in place will remain to support local managers to build the capacity and capability for the on-going management of mental health and wellbeing locally.
- 11 Whilst corporate HSW will continue to support services, the accountability of team and service mental health and wellbeing remains the responsibility of local management teams. Regular management information will continue to be provided as part of the framework mentioned above.

Appendices

- ANNEX A Supporting colleagues with Mental Ill Health case studies

Background papers

- None