

Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing report

Date: 17th June 2024

Report of: Director of Strategy and Resources

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

Following attendance at Scrutiny Board in October 2023, this report provides a further update on ongoing work across the organisation and within the corporate health, safety and wellbeing team to promote positive workplace mental health and wellbeing.

The report covers:

- progress being made within directorates in respect of the integrated Health, Safety and Wellbeing approach and assurance framework
- valuable work taking place in frontline teams across the Council
- a progress update against key actions in both wellbeing and mental health, led by the corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing team

Recommendations

Scrutiny Board is asked to:

- a) Note the content of the report and the ongoing work and progress to promote positive workplace mental health and wellbeing.
- b) Identify any further actions arising from consideration of this report.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report provides an update regarding the current position in relation to workplace mental health and wellbeing management. Included is an update on the 1) bringing to life of our governance framework and joined-up health, safety and wellbeing approach, 2) important work being undertaken within frontline teams and 3) an update on progress against our priority actions in wellbeing and mental health (each treated separately),

What impact will this proposal have?

- 2 This item will allow further scrutiny of the Council's approach to managing workplace mental health and wellbeing, which remains a key priority for Leeds City Council and organisations across the country. It also contributes to LGA Peer Review recommendations in relation to supporting staff health and wellbeing.

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

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 3 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. This will therefore support and enable the delivery of the Organisational Plan and Best City Ambitions.
- 4 Post-pandemic, UK workplaces continue to face a significant mental health challenge at work and Leeds City Council is no exception. Absence figures due to mental health mirror a nationwide upward trend. Whilst workforce survey results have generally been encouraging in terms of how members of the workforce are feeling, increased pressure and demanding workloads has consistently come out as one of the themes causing concern. This was highlighted in the five wellbeing pulse surveys conducted during the period May 2020 to March 2022 and more recently in the 2023 staff engagement survey where over a third (38%) of respondents did not agree that their workload was manageable. It was also referenced in the LGA Peer Review Report. Encouragingly, 76% of respondents did agree that their manager looks out for their health and wellbeing.
- 5 Leeds City Council's significant and ongoing workforce financial challenges set against a cost of living crisis backdrop, means that creating an environment and culture where people feel comfortable talking about their mental health and asking for support is key. The Being our best Organisation Plan sets out four key expectations of appraising managers, one of which highlights the importance of managing staff wellbeing. Working together to take action around workplace mental health means that problems can be addressed early or prevented before they even arise. It 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. Working with leaders to champion mental health and wellbeing in their directorates and equipping managers with the resources they need to take action locally in their teams remains a key part of the corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing teams' approach.
- 6 Our governance framework and joined up approach to managing health, safety and wellbeing has been shared, embraced by the organisation and is being acted upon. Each of our five

directors has chosen mental health and wellbeing as one of their key Health Safety and Wellbeing priorities for 2024/25 and has made a personal pledge and commitment. To keep momentum around action being taken, Directors continue to have quarterly one to one meetings with the Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing, using council-wide and directorate-specific data. This enables a tailored, preventative, and evidence-led approach to be taken within directorates and across teams.

- 7 In addition to regular meetings at a director-level, HR Business Partners and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partners are working closely together to provide strong business partnering support at a service and team level in priority areas. This support will be further enhanced by an additional ten in-service Health, Safety and Wellbeing officers who will be mentored and supported by Business Partners in the corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing team and equipped with the tools they need to excel in their role.

Recognition of work being undertaken in services

8. The work of the corporate health, safety and wellbeing team in setting the direction is important but equally important is the focus and drive of local teams. Our wellbeing champions and mental health first aiders work tirelessly in their teams to improve mental health and wellbeing and there is a whole host of value-adding wellbeing-related activity now taking place. Championing wellbeing and self-care is particularly important in our frontline workforces and a few examples of the fantastic work happening in frontline teams are provided below.
9. Within Adults and Health, the Care Delivery Service has implemented support circles, one to one wellbeing conversations, a team walk for the “moving more” themed mental health awareness week, held staff workshops to work collaboratively on service design and set up a “men working in care” peer group.
10. Within Communities, Housing and Environment, the Waste Management Service has been particularly proactive in commissioning and signposting staff to a whole host of wellbeing and mental health activities and support for frontline operatives. This includes “extra-curricular” activities (paid for and organised by staff) such as football, clay pigeon shooting and Thai boxing, as well as a whole host of in work, drop-in opportunities at Newmarket House to speak to specialists in housing, debt management, physical health and mental health, gambling awareness and smoking cessation. To tackle the high rate of musculoskeletal issues experienced by these frontline, operational staff the service have also access to physiotherapy sessions at Newmarket House, through a managed referral process.
11. Within Strategy and Resources, the Leeds Building Service has created two support groups, a “Be kind to yourself” women’s mental health support group and a mental health support group called “Simon’s space” for male colleagues or anyone identifying as male. The service has also highlighted the role of Mental Health First Aiders, promoted lunchtime walking, encouraged use of a “wellbeing room” and regularly engages with the workforce to promote broader wellbeing initiatives and services such as our employee assistance provider and financial wellbeing.
12. Within Civic Enterprise Leeds, a monthly newsletter entitled “Healthtalk” has been developed and has received good feedback from staff, there have been men’s health sessions, a “riddle of the week” to solve, sessions on the difference between food and mood and staff completed a wellbeing circuit walk in Armley Park for Mental Health Awareness week. The service is also collecting and analysing data from risk assessments, reasonable adjustments made and Occupational Health referrals to identify any trends and make service improvements accordingly.

13. Within Children and Families children's nurseries, there has been the promotion of mental health through a newsletter, lots of signposting to support agencies and encouragement to use mental health first aiders within the directorate.
14. Within City Development, a programme of face-to-face training for frontline operatives in depots is underway. Topics being covered include a demo of our employee assistance provider to one hundred and twenty frontline staff, fourteen group listening sessions, sessions on dignity at work, values and behaviours, neurodiversity, equality diversity and inclusion, lots of signposting around mental health support, awareness-raising about stress and a session where staff could meet Vanessa Wenham, our Freedom To Speak Up Guardian.
15. From the selection of in-service wellbeing activity provided above, it is clear that we are starting to see positive outputs from our investment in getting the foundations right. A number of services and teams are engaging with the direction of travel and are keen to not only support staff when they are struggling but also to take preventative steps like health promotion and management upskilling, all of which serves to create a stronger wellbeing culture. Areas where we are not seeing as much activity will benefit from the ten additional in-service Health, Safety and Wellbeing officers, good practice sharing and peer support, and the roll-out of an organisation-wide management standard which will be made available shortly, following a short period of taking feedback. The standard will provide a useful benchmark for services to use and that, along with the positive measures outlined above, will help to make a difference that is seen and felt at all levels of our workforce.

Progress against key actions, led by the corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing team

16. The corporate wellbeing team continues to play a steering role on the journey to excellence through direction-setting toolkits, awareness-raising activity and through developing and supporting key stakeholders based in local teams, like our mental health first aider and wellbeing champion community. The most fundamental role of the team remains to equip managers to make confident and competent decisions, which we know will make the single biggest difference out in teams. Our workplace wellbeing priorities of "Promote", "Prevent" and "Support" continue to underpin our wider wellbeing work programme and work with individual managers and serve as an important reminder of the need for balance in our approach, focussing on preventative action as well as strong support whenever someone is struggling.
17. Since attending Scrutiny Board in October 2023, the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team has taken time to reflect on where best to focus its energy and resources. Team members have continued to listen to, and engage with, services and teams, and work closely with Mental Health First Aiders, Wellbeing champions and trade unions to fully understand feelings of staff, particularly those in frontline roles. The team has developed a mission statement with key deliverables and has taken time to share this with the groups mentioned above at collaboration events like the Mental Health First Aider connect events which were attended by over ninety Mental Health First Aiders. A key deliverable within that mission statement is to deliver a clear programme to promote, prevent and support mental health beyond crisis.
18. A "You said, we're doing" document was requested and produced following attendance at Scrutiny Board in October 2023 and the suggested areas of focus by the Board continue to influence the corporate wellbeing teams' work programme. The document has been updated six months on and is provided for reference in appendix one. In addition to this, progress against key actions in both workplace wellbeing and mental health is provided below:

Wellbeing		
Area of focus	Current position	What good will look like
Leadership accountability	Leaders are engaging well with the monthly one to ones and have made personal pledges and commitments.	Leaders leading workplace wellbeing in their areas and taking action in line with their pledges. Wellbeing conversations will happen regularly and naturally alongside regular performance management including appraisal
Introduction of a wellbeing toolkit and in-service wellbeing standard	An in-service wellbeing standard has been developed and is being shared with trade unions before wider release. The standard forms part of a refreshed wellbeing toolkit for all services to use.	The toolkit will be followed by all managers in the management of team wellbeing.
Awareness-raising campaign days and weeks	These are supported to varying degrees presently. We are seeing more joined-up work (joined up financial wellbeing work with anchor organisations, promotion of the Rob Burrow marathon and “Moving more” themed mental health awareness week activity being recent examples)	A clear calendar of events with joined-up activity taking place across the council and beyond, using opportunities presented for working with anchor organisations and other partners
Developing our workplace wellbeing community with a focus on wellbeing champions	Wellbeing champions currently benefit from quarterly connect events. A #BeWell connect event in November 2024 has been planned to bring together all wellbeing champions and mental health first aiders with input from our Occupational Health service and the Healthy Minds Network.	The community will connect regularly, share good practice and have regular opportunities to “decompress”.
Enhancing the management training offer	The training offer for managers has been refreshed and is now available in a clear document. Later this year will see the launch of a core modules “Be Your Best on Health, Safety and Wellbeing” which will cover all essential areas including mental health and wellbeing. Services are being encouraged to focus on management development and utilise the offer available.	Managers will feel confident and competent to manage mental health and wellbeing in their teams and will know where to go to for tools and support.

19. Several of the above focus areas apply equally when looking at mental health. These are therefore not repeated below but instead, specific action taking place around mental health is provided.

Mental Health		
Area of focus	Current position	What good will look like
Joining up internal experts on workplace mental health	<p>A workplace mental health action group, comprised of cross-council representatives and with a clear terms of reference document, is now meeting regularly to connect, collaborate and sense-check our direction of travel.</p> <p>We continue to work collaboratively across organisational boundaries, a recent example being our involvement in the Mindful Employer all day conference event at Leeds Beckett campus.</p>	There is a clear joining up of our internal experts on workplace mental health and this improved joining up drives local work in a helpful and purposeful way.

Introduction of a mental health toolkit	A mental health toolkit has been developed to provide clear guidance and support in managing mental health. The toolkit will be shared with trade unions before wider release.	The toolkit will be followed by all managers in the management of team mental health.
Growing and developing our community of Mental Health First Aiders	The whole Mental Health First Aider community has had an opportunity to learn together at two Connect events in December 2023 and April 2024. Monthly share and learn meetings are now in place and a planned #BeWell event in November will see them come together with wellbeing champions.	There will be a thriving, purposeful community of Mental Health First Aiders making a real difference out in teams.
Prevent and supporting mental health-related sickness absence	Work is underway within services where there are high instances of mental health-related absence including stress risk assessment (individual and team) to unpick causation factors, implement solutions and provide better mental health support whilst colleagues are away from the workplace.	We see less Mental health-related absence but where it does occur, it is well managed.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

20. 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.

Wards affected:
Have ward members been consulted? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

What are the resource implications?

21. There are no specific resource implications contained in this report. However, implementation of the framework and approach outlined above requires ongoing input from across the HR service to promote, develop and support Health and Wellbeing initiatives from existing resources. It also relies on service areas recognising the value of investing their own resources.

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

22. A key risk to the organisation is that of increased mental health-related sickness absence and poor culture. This potentially leads to lost productivity and 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 capacity in the team is reduced.

What are the legal implications?

23. This report has no specific legal implications.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

24. The reasons for absence are multifaceted and therefore require a range of interventions which we will continue to develop to respond to matters that are impacting on attendance. Throughout 2024/25 we will focus on the following core interventions with a strong sense of collaboration and ownership throughout all layers of the authority:

- preventing and supporting mental health-related sickness absence is a combined focus for HR teams throughout 2024/25. Leading a targeted business partnering and manager approach to supporting services with high instances of mental health-related absence with manager and colleague support including the stress risk assessment (individual and team) to unpick causation factors, implement solutions and provide better mental health support whilst colleagues are away from the workplace.
- the combined efforts of the corporate and local teams to establish good in-service wellbeing and mental health foundations at service level with key conversations/toolkits covering managing workload and pressures.
- helping managers to Be their Best and have safe and trusted relationships with team members creates a positive culture and minimises the risk of work-related stress, conflict and reduces the risk of stress related absence. The development of managers will raise awareness, increase knowledge, improve team culture and encourage healthier conversations resulting in faster support via simple pathways.

How will success be measured?

25. Success will be measured through:

- quantitative monitoring of managing attendance data, including the analysis of any trends and patterns.
- qualitative monitoring of staff survey results and business partnering case load analysis.
- A programme of frontline staff health, safety and wellbeing audits and conversations.

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

26. Managing attendance is an ongoing process that will always be in place. The intensive support that is currently in place will be maintained to support local managers to build the capacity and capability for the ongoing management of attendance locally. Whilst HR will continue to support services, the accountability of team and service performance remains the responsibility of local management teams. Regular management information will continue to be provided as part of the governance framework mentioned above.

27. Corporate HSW will take a front stage lead on wellbeing policy, steer and engagement with leaders and services to establish good practices and together with HR colleagues analyse data in order to implement further adjustments.

Appendices

- Updated “You said, we’re doing” document.

Background papers

- Not applicable.