

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – LEGAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES, HR AND CORPORATE POLICY

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with an update on the measures in place to support employee wellbeing.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives/other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objective under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

- **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human, and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on 14 April 2021, the Committee received information about absences related to mental illness and mental wellbeing. The report also focussed on the resources available for employees to assist them to effectively manage their wellbeing.
- 3.2 At that time it was acknowledged that given the desire to place a greater focus on employee wellbeing and the ongoing pandemic, that there was a continued need to strengthen and, where possible, enhance the wellbeing support on offer by the council, so that employees receive the right level of support and especially at times of need.
- 3.3 In doing so, it was noted that future priority actions would focus on taking forward the wellbeing action plan and exploring the therapeutic provision to meet the demand of more complex cases, and interventions that target groups of employees. An earmarked reserve was established as part of the 2020-21-year end accounts process to progress these initiatives.

4. Current situation/proposal

Health and Wellbeing Role and Working Group

- 4.1 The new Health and Wellbeing Officer took up employment on a part time basis in August 2021, creating capacity to support council wide wellbeing initiatives, as outlined in the wellbeing action plan, and actively engage employees in this work.

This supplements the contributions made by HR Business Partners and managers in promoting employee wellbeing.

4.2 As part of their induction, the officer has been able to meet with a number of teams, groups, and individuals to gain an overall understanding of the arrangements in place for staff wellbeing as well as other related council procedures, thus providing a fresh look at the approaches being taken and making some early improvements. Examples are as follows:

- Communicating more positive and varied health and wellbeing information and initiatives via staff Bridgenders staff messages and producing leaflets for notice boards
- Delivering HR surgeries with HR Business Partners, and guidance for managers on welfare meetings with staff, focussing on good practice
- Promoting health and wellbeing in all aspects of work, e.g., greater focus in induction and other management arrangements
- Revising the stress risk assessment to make it more user-friendly with appropriate guidance for managers and staff
- Introducing and promoting a health and wellbeing checklist for those specifically working from home
- Engaging with managers of front-line services to understand specific needs of employees

4.3 A key priority has been to establish a corporate health and wellbeing group. The Health and Wellbeing Officer has engaged with key groups to help shape this, including the Heads of Service group. Discussions have also taken place with trade union representatives, who will contribute and join the group, alongside Directorate employees who have expressed an interest.

4.4 The inaugural meeting is planned, where the aims and objectives of the group will be reviewed by the participants:

Health & Wellbeing Group Aims

- To communicate and encourage health and wellbeing within BCBC
- To showcase that physical and mental health are equally important and one can support the other
- To highlight initiatives that empower people to improve their health & wellbeing
- To use as many types of communication as possible to reach as many people as we can

Health & Wellbeing Group Objectives

- To promote change in lifestyle to gain an improved work life balance
- To encourage even one person to make a change with their physical or mental health and promote positivity
- To use healthy competition to encourage healthy options
- To highlight lifestyle activities that people might not know much about but might be encouraged to try

Employee Engagement

- 4.5 The working group will consider communication and engagement and feedback from employees. Of relevance is the 2021/2022 staff survey which was launched in June 2021 and the [feedback report](#) and accompanying [infographic](#) was made available in the Autumn edition of the staff magazine.
- 4.6 The survey covered a range of topics including staff wellbeing and the responses told us that:
- 60% of staff rated the quality of the counselling service as very good
 - 63% of staff rated the quality of the lifestyle service as very good or good
 - 50% of staff rated the quality of the Zest service as very good or good
 - 69% of staff strongly agreed or agreed that they were comfortable with the work demands placed upon them in their role
 - 59% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to meet the demands of their job within working hours
 - 68% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they felt supported to manage personal wellbeing whilst in work
 - 82% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were aware of the mental wellbeing resources and support available to staff
 - 59% of staff stated that they would not be interested in getting involved in a staff network group, whereas 14% stated that they would be interested in getting involved in a staff network group. The most popular responses were for a mental health network group followed by a menopause network group and then Carers network group.

Learning and Development

- 4.7 At the meeting on 14 April 2021, the Committee were advised of the training in place to support mental wellbeing and further proposals to enhance this for 2021/2022. These workshops have been delivered throughout this training calendar year and are summarised at **Appendix 1**, with extracts of employee evaluations.
- 4.8 Of these, ten sessions have been commissioned through joint working with trade unions via the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF), whilst the new courses introduced were delivered by the Learning and Development Advisor in HR/OD.

Employee Assistance Programme

- 4.9 The Council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider continues to be Care First, and the components of the programme are regularly and widely communicated. They offer a range of information and emotional support for employees, with telephone or online counselling available, 24/7. Given the restrictions, face to face sessions have been restricted.
- 4.10 The EAP also includes: access to Information Specialists offering advice on practical issues; weekly publicity calendars comprising daily webinars, which have now been running for over 100 weeks; and a new version of its Zest platform, offering a wide range of wellbeing tools, which includes a new wellbeing assessment and improved functions to allow employees to connect with others.
- 4.11 A new Mental Health App was introduced in June 2021 which includes a range of interactive tools, helpful tips and visual and mental exercises using cognitive

behavioural therapy. The app is free to use and features meditation, mindfulness and breathing exercises as well as toolkits to identify behaviours and monitor progress, mood trackers.

- 4.12 **Appendix 2** provides a summary of EAP usage between April 2021 – December 2021. During this period there have been 210 contacts to Care First which is an increase of 68 from the same period in 2020/21. 129 of those contacts have been via the 24/7 counselling line and this continues to be the most preferred method. Employees continue to access the service, mainly through self-referral, which demonstrates that they are looking after their own welfare. The number of employees accessing the Lifestyle website (the practical support and information platform) continues to be high with 232 registered users during this period.
- 4.13 Whilst Care First provide details of numbers of those who access their services from the council, these services are of course confidential, and no feedback is available on customer satisfaction. However, feedback via the staff survey has helped to gain some views about awareness and quality of these services.

Additional Emotional Support

- 4.14 Additional counselling support has been made available, which has been beneficial for those employees who are considered at risk of not being able to attend work or those returning to work following an absence and employees who may have been affected by a critical incident. This is a confidential service and referrals have been made direct but, in many cases, these have been made following discussions with managers or support provided by the HR Business Partners.
- 4.15 Some 45 employees have accessed this service since April 2021 and there have been some positive outcomes, where employees have either remained in work or returned to work following this support. Consideration is being given to how emotional support can be provided for employees, as part of our Occupational Health contract.

Physical Wellbeing

- 4.16 The health and wellbeing group aims to consider both physical and emotional wellbeing, which are considered equally important. The council already promotes discounted leisure membership which gives unlimited access to gyms, swimming pools, health suites, group exercise classes and racket sports at leisure centres across the borough. The working group will be asked to consider other physical wellbeing initiatives as an early priority, including piloting the Halo @ Home app.

Trade Union Perspective

- 4.17 There are positive and healthy working relationships with trade union colleagues, regular and open dialogue exists on matters such as employee health and wellbeing, and particularly during the pandemic. Positive feedback has been received in response to this report and the developments being made, with areas of good practice considered as:

- the continued support to employees who are required to work from home and the flexible working arrangements in place; support for employees who have found working at home difficult, albeit a later development.
- the services via Care First including webinars on topics such as, stress, mindfulness, mental health awareness, managing pressure, relaxation, coping therapies has also been recognised, with an increased in the take up of the Care first Lifestyle and Zest.
- the appointment of a Health and Wellbeing Officer is a positive move, in being able to offer a more tailored service which meets the needs of the authority and its employees.

4.18 Trade union colleagues emphasise that all employees must have the opportunity to access these support mechanisms and wider council communications and they are actively involved in progressing this via their membership on the Digital Transformation Board and the Communications sub group.

Future Wellbeing Work Programme

4.19 Priorities include the need to engage with front line groups of employees who do not have access to technology in their role to ensure they are aware of wellbeing resources and are able to access the corporate training programme. So, for example, work is underway to deliver targeted toolbox talks on staff wellbeing and support at depots and bite size training sessions which is also been explored in social care.

4.20 For other groups of employees, whilst the benefits of home/agile working have been significant this has driven the need for different strategies to ensure a sense of connection, maintain health and wellbeing and to avoid isolation.

4.21 This is a broad agenda, and different and innovative approaches will be required to respond to specific challenges and circumstances. Our ability to attract and retain employees will also depend on how we respond to the changing expectations in relation to work.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1 As this is an information report, there is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty, and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services, and functions. This is an information report; therefore, it is not necessary to carry out an EIA in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this information report.

Long Term – The wellbeing of the council’s workforce is a high priority and longer term it is vital that the council is regarded as a good and fair employer where employee health and wellbeing is a priority. Over time this should also positively impact upon recruitment and retention.

Prevention – The work being undertaken is relevant to our workforce and in the in prevention of poor wellbeing and potential absences and poor morale.

Integration – This information report supports the well-being objective of Smarter Use of Resources and ensures integration of all employees.

Collaboration – The work being undertaken is done in collaboration with employees, their trade union representatives, and services and where possible PSB partners.

Involvement – All employees will be encouraged to benefit from this work and volunteers will be actively involved in the health and wellbeing group and its initiatives in the future.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report as it is an information report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 That the Committee notes the work being undertaken in relation to employee wellbeing across the council.

Kelly Watson

Chief Officer – Legal & Regulatory Services, HR & Corporate Policy
February 2022

Contact officer: Debra Beeke
Group Manager – HR & OD

Telephone: (01656) 643212

Email: Debra.Beeke@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal address: Civic Offices,
Angel Street
Bridgend
CF31 4WB

Background documents: None

Workshops delivered during April 2021 – January 2022 (WULF)

Course	No of workshops delivered	Evaluation on course content	Evaluation on course content	Employee Feedback
Confidence in the workplace	3	Excellent – 25% Good – 75%	Excellent – 38% Good – 62%	<p>“It was interesting learning about how verbal and non-verbal communication impacts on confidence.”</p> <p>“It was informative and there were certainly some useful strategies taught on how to be more assertive to carry forward.”</p>
Communication in the online workplace	3	Excellent – 25% Good – 75%	Excellent – 38% Good – 62%	<p>“I felt that the course was a good reminder of what we should be putting in place when communicating both on the telephone, online and on Teams.”</p> <p>“The course was full of advice and support, the trainer was interactive and encouraging. This course was very useful for people who would be arranging meetings and have a team of staff to manage. It supported you with tools of how to include all members of your team, deal with online meetings and how to prepare.</p>
Resilience Training	3	Excellent – 67% Good – 33%	Excellent – 56% Good – 44%	<p>“The facilitator had a good understanding of the topic and was able to share his knowledge in an interesting and informative way.”</p> <p>“This course gave me a good understanding of how to recognise and manage stress, not only professionally but in my personal life as well.”</p>
Resilience Training – Social Care	1	Excellent – 100%	Excellent – 67% Good – 33%	<p>“I felt that the course has given me a better understanding of how others and myself cope with the pressures in the work place. The trainer was extremely engaging.”</p> <p>“The course was interesting and gave me tips to take away and use when back in the workplace.”</p>

New Courses introduced between April 2021 – January 2022

Course	No of workshops delivered	Evaluation on course content	Evaluation on course content	Employee Feedback
Mental Health Awareness for employees	4	Excellent – 83% Good – 17%	Excellent – 83% Good – 17%	<p>“It was a very good overview to being aware of mental health within the workplace and the importance of reducing the stigma associated with mental health difficulties.”</p> <p>“The course unpicked what mental health is and the factors that take care of wellbeing which I found helpful.”</p>
Mental Health Awareness for managers	7	Excellent – 62% Good – 38%	Excellent – 55% Good – 41%	<p>“Good to break out into virtual rooms to discuss with other members of staff. It is often the practical solutions used by others that you take away to implement from courses.”</p> <p>“It was good to have the awareness and suggested strategies to support people going through difficult times.”</p>
Managing Stress	4	Excellent – 53% Good – 42% Adequate – 5%	Excellent – 58% Good – 37% Adequate – 5%	<p>“I found the session very interactive and was able to clearly identify the common factors that result to one being stressed/overwhelmed with everyday life occurrences.”</p> <p>“The knowledge and experience of the trainer was excellent. She had an excellent understanding of stress, its factors, and how to combat these.”</p>
Introduction to Anxiety Disorders	4	Excellent – 75% Good – 25%	Excellent – 69% Good – 31%	<p>“I felt that the trainers approach towards mental health and anxiety disorders was informative and incredibly knowledgeable; her delivery was non-judgemental and she kept me engaged throughout the session.”</p> <p>“The course was very well structured, it wasn't too long to conflict with other work priorities or overload you with information, yet the amount of content covered in the 2 hour session was excellent. It was a good balance of information provided by the trainer who is obviously very knowledgeable, and contribution of ideas and experiences from the attendees in breakout areas.”</p>

<p>Depression Awareness and how to take care of yourself and others</p>	<p>5</p>	<p>Excellent – 78% Good – 22%</p>	<p>Excellent – 67% Good – 33%</p>	<p>“Good level of open discussion. Good engagement throughout the course and covered useful strategies and techniques which I thought were useful for all attending.”</p> <p>“The course was extremely good - I felt that the pace of the course was good and the information given was relevant to the post that I am doing. Covid has been hard for the staff and individuals who attend our service and this will assist me to help them if required.”</p>
---	----------	---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---

Summary Use of the Employee Assistance Programme, Care First:

The information below captures Care First usage between April 2021 and December 2021.

	Care First Report Apr - June 2021	Care First Report July - December 21	
	Q1	Q2	Q3
Face to Face Sessions	22	18	15
Telephone Counselling	38	49	42
Telephone Information Service	6	3	7
Online Counselling	2	2	6
New Clients	22	19	28
Unique Page Views on Care First Lifestyle Website	313	80	73

