Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021 – 2024

Introduction

The health and wellbeing of our workforce is a priority for Waltham Forest and our People Strategy sets out clear commitments to improve what is on offer for staff. When staff are happy and healthy, they live more fulfilling lives both inside and outside of work. Health and Wellbeing impacts our overall sense of self, how we live and enjoy our lives, interact with people, and overcome mental and physical challenges. The Employee Health and Wellbeing strategy sets out how we aim to improve wellbeing in the workplace, look after and support staff so they can prioritise their health, and improve organisational performance, by equipping them with the support, tools, and information they require.

The coronavirus pandemic has impacted on our daily lives and brought on new personal and work challenges. Staff have quickly adapted to new ways of working including working from home or in a new service area to ensure residents could still access critical council services. Our employees have truly embraced what it means to be public servants during the pandemic and have gone above and beyond to ensure council services are delivered to residents.

This has often meant that the lines between work and home life become blurred. As a result of national and regional lockdowns regular forms of exercise and activity have been replaced with more sedentary lifestyles. Staff have reported the negative impact not being able to move around and socialise with friends, family, and colleagues has had on their overall sense of health and wellbeing. Many staff members have suffered bereavements and dealt with the devastating loss of a loved ones, friends and in a few cases colleagues they worked with. This, coupled with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about the future, including financial wellbeing, have highlighted the need for action.

In our People Strategy we commit to providing for our staff well-being to ensure they feel physically, mentally and financially supported to deliver services. This strategy fits under the "Building Agility" section of the People Strategy as we recognise when healthy employees have a good sense of wellbeing, this will result in improved working that benefits our residents. As many of the Council's workforce are residents, improving the health and wellbeing of employees will also support improvements in health and wellbeing beyond our workforce alone.

Our Aims

The objectives of this Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy are to:
[INSERT INFOGRAHPIC]

1. Support and maintain a safe and healthy working environment
2. Encouraging more conversations and an environment where we talk about physical and mental, and financial wellbeing as part of our management of our teams
3. Improve physical wellbeing of our workforce
4. Improve mental wellbeing of our workforce
5. Provide resources to improve financial wellbeing of our workforce
6. Remove barriers that prevent employees with health conditions or impairments from achieving their potential, so they are supported to remain in work, e.g. ensuring access for staff to DSE assessments and occupational health
7. Encouraging and supporting our employees to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle by being adaptable to the needs of the individual.

Insights on Health and Wellbeing from Waltham Forest Staff

Health and Wellbeing is defined as the achievement and maintenance of physical fitness and mental stability (NHS).

This strategy has drawn on key staff insights obtained from staff surveys carried out in 2020 and 2021. Key insights were also gathered from the 'Ways of working wellbeing' pilot that took place between March and April 2021, accompanying focus groups, and home display screen equipment (DSE) assessments.

[INSERT INFOGRAPHIC-Including key insights from staff survey 2021, etc]

79% of staff said they felt the Council was doing well in supporting their health and wellbeing during the pandemic. We wish to build and improve on that.

According to Public Health England (2015) we now sit an average of 8.9 hours a day with office workers sitting for longer than they did before. Public Health (2016) also noted that people in the UK are around 20% less active now than in the 1960s and, if current trends continue, we will be 35% less active by 2030. Staff have expressed concerns with 31% of those working from home reporting on the negative impact this is having on their health and wellbeing. Being able to communicate and socialise with other people is a significant contributor to feeling happier and connected. In 2021, 20% of our staff reported they have been feeling isolated whilst working from home which rises to 30% for those under 35.

Our Occupational Health referrals show Mental Health and Musculoskeletal issues as being the main causes of poor health amongst our workforce. Improvements in these areas should have a significant impact on the employee experience. We will encourage the physical health of our staff, as it has a significant connection with mental health. We want to ensure our people obtain the maximum benefits from regular physical activity including improved mood, reduced stress, and anxiety, and improved mental health.

We are also aware of the significance that secure financial wellbeing can have upon an individual. Financial worries and stress can take a toll on physical and mental health impacting on sleep quality, self-esteem, and overall quality of life. We have begun looking into ways we can support employees by sharing ways they can access free, confidential, and independent money and debt advise as well as publishing our commitments to closing the ethnicity and gender pay gap.

We encourage managers to work with their teams to explore different ways of working which may be beneficial to individual staff health and wellbeing needs, whilst meeting the needs of their service. This includes using greater agile working or flexible working. We also want to ensure managers feel confident enough to discuss wellbeing within their team, to reduce potential stigma, and that we can provide the tools that enable open discussions.

We believe the best way to ensure the health and wellbeing of our staff is to take an holistic approach that recognises the individual and combined impacts poor health and wellbeing can have. Our people are fundamental to our success and we are committed to improving their health and wellbeing so they can lead happy, active, and healthy lives.

Key themes and action plan

We will have an annual wellbeing action plan based on the needs of our workforce at the time. The action plan will be reviewed quarterly and will be designed to deliver wellbeing solutions for our workforce no matter where they are located. For more information about the action plan please see appendix 1.

The actions will centre on three levels on intervention. [INSERT INFOGRAPHIC]

1. Preventative (Primary) – Ensuring the physical work environment and culture promotes health and wellbeing i.e. Promoting agile working where possible for service delivery, or reducing stigma around talking about health and wellbeing
2. Upskilling (Secondary) – Promoting wellbeing by upskilling workers i.e. wellbeing buddies, on the job competency training, resilience, stress and time management skills and Thrive App for CBT
3. Recovery (Tertiary) – Treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery i.e. Employee Assistance Programme, accessing wellbeing buddies as first point of contact, and occupational health

Along with the three levels of intervention the strategy will utilise and promote the NHS approved 5 ways to wellbeing that include;

- Connecting – work colleagues, teams, contractors, clients, improving equality and rehabilitation
- Being more active – taking the stairs, using bikes or walking routes to travel round the borough, use of discounted exercise facilities
- Being in the now – noticing nature, taking a break from the desk to have lunch, having some me time/social interaction time, improving resilience
- Learning and development – as inquisitive beings there is a desire to continue to grow and learn new things – not all need to be work related, look to improve staff confidence
- Give – improve uptake of volunteering, getting everyone to give positive feedback and for managers and staff to say thank you

The Council has already used the 5 ways to wellbeing to demonstrate our offer to staff. Information can be found on ForestHub.
Alongside the 5 ways to wellbeing we will also encourage staff to have good sleeping patterns as this has a significant impact on positive health and wellbeing.

What is already on offer for staff at the Council?

[INSTERT INFOGRAPHIC]

The health and wellbeing of our employees is fundamental to the success of the organisation. We have made the following resources available:

- Forest Wellbeing Pages in Microsoft Teams
- Podcasts on the five ways to wellbeing
- Wellbeing working groups
- Suite of Health and wellbeing courses on our e-learning platform [see appendix 2]
- Thrive app available for all LBWF staff
- Wellbeing buddies
- Signposting to mental health support
- Number of virtual and in person exercise sessions
- Bereavement support and advice
- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) including employee counselling
- For further information, including links to external organisations on specific topics, please visit the Health and Wellbeing page on ForestHub

How we will measure the impact of what we are doing?

We want to ensure our staff enjoy good health and wellbeing and have access to useful and relevant information and resources. The strategy will last a maximum of three years to allow for rescoping to reflect wider cultural changes i.e. the impact of COVID-19. The review process will take a collaborative approach and utilise feedback and insights from staff. All monitoring will reflect the work of the People Strategy which also acknowledges the diversity of staff that work within the council and how that may impact monitoring.

The effectiveness of the strategy will be measured through:

- Monitoring the levels and rates of sickness absence including work related stress.
  - This will enable us to justify the cost of initiatives relating to the strategy
- Pulse Survey data specifically questions on physical and mental, with the aim to introduce questions around financial wellbeing too
- Analysing data from our provides including occupational health, Thrive app date, and changes in DSE assessments requirements
- Response to the introduction of any new wellbeing initiatives.
- Success in applying for wider/national schemes e.g. the London Healthy workplaces award
- Feedback from various sources including; Wellbeing Advisory Group, Staff Network Forums, Intranet site activity, Trade Unions (frequency to be determined).

We are also aware for the following risks and interdependencies for the strategy delivery:

- Unknown stress upon staff due to changing in work priorities and the wider social climate
- Adaptation of new ways of working ie Hybrid meetings or Agile/flexible working
- Reliance on managers to encourage their staff to partake in various health and wellbeing events/initiatives
- A set budget may mean that we may not be able to access all staff working sites
- Lack of buy in and participation due to competing work pressures
- Change in public health priorities could reduce their collaboration with wellbeing initiatives
- Change in People Plan priorities moves focus away from staff wellbeing

Appendix 1- Action Plan

Please see linked document for first year action plan and second level plan
[Action Plan](#)

Appendix 2 – Training

Course Name	Platform Type	Course Overview
Personal Resilience	E-Learning - 30 min	In today's workplace employees are expected to cope with increased pressure, budget cuts, performance targets, changing roles and an uncertainty about the future. Workplace absences are costing the UK economy £29 billion each year and stress is a big contributing factor. Personal Resilience can play a key role in how we manage stressful and difficult situations and will help individuals to improve their performance in the workplace, as well as having an impact on their health and well-being.
Mental Health Awareness	E-Learning -	This e-learning course aims to raise your awareness of mental health issues and will look at some of the more common problems as well as the causes of mental health illness, stigma and discrimination and where to access help and support.
Menopause Webinar	Webinar	On Menopause Awareness Day we are hosting a webinar provided by our partners at Thrive to discuss the menopause. We are encouraging as many men and women join to learn about the changes that happen during the menopause and how these can be discussed as part of an open dialogue and managed in a healthy way.
Drug and Alcohol Awareness	E-Learning - 25 min	This module aims to raise your awareness of drugs and alcohol. We'll take a look at the recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption and view some useful tips for cutting back, as well as examining the more common drug types and their side effects and symptoms. We will also provide sources of support for individuals and employers, including a guide to spotting the early warning signs of substance misuse.
Display Screen Equipment	E-Learning - 25 min	Our e-learning module is designed to give the learner a thorough overview of good DSE practice, instructing them as to how to set up their workstation and adjust their immediate environment to minimise the risk of injury and distress.
Communication Skills	E-Learning -	The aim of this course is to provide you with practical ways to develop your communication skills and help you perform more effectively at work.
Agile Working for Managers - eLearning	E-Learning	This module has been designed to help you manage a team during the introduction to Smarter Working. One of the aims of smarter working is to create a more agile workforce and managers play a key in helping the organisation to achieve this.
Personal Resilience	E-Learning	Personal resilience is, essentially, the ability to bounce back from difficult situations. It's a quality that can prove crucial in a professional setting, where stress, adversity, knockbacks and tight deadlines are often all too common. This module gets the learner thinking about their own level of resilience and how it can be improved upon. Included are various tips and techniques for stress busting, relaxation and visualisation
Emotional Intelligence	E-Learning - 40 min	Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability of individuals to recognise their own and others' emotions, to discriminate between different feelings and to use this information to guide thinking and actions. Studies have shown that people with high levels of emotional intelligence have greater mental health, exemplary job performance and more potent leadership skills. By the end of our Emotional Intelligence module, the learner will understand how EI can increase their self-awareness, help them to work with others and improve their professional performance
Stress Awareness	e-learning - 40 min	Pressure, in some circumstances, can help us to perform to a higher level and achieve our goals. When pressure becomes excessive, however, stress occurs. Our Stress Awareness module is designed to give you an overview of stress awareness at work. We'll explain why stress occurs and how it can manifest itself physically and psychologically, and offer practical hints and tips on how to cope with the ever-increasing demands of the modern workplace. A 12-question knowledge check section is included

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Course Name	Platform Type	Course Overview
Domestic Abuse Awareness	e-learning - 30 min	This course will help you to recognise domestic abuse .
Mental Health Awareness	e-learning	Mental illness is one of the least understood and most stigmatised medical conditions, and as such many sufferers face prejudice and discrimination. In fact, with the right support and treatment most people can lead productive and fulfilling lives. Our Mental Health Awareness e-learning module will examine the increasing prevalence of mental health issues, including common types of illness and the symptoms of psychosis. We'll also look at the various forms of treatment that are available, including therapy-based approaches
Anxiety Awareness	e-learning	This module introduces the learner to the various types of Anxiety disorders, signs and symptoms. It takes an in depth look at the strategies and methods of helps for managing anxiety in daily life
Drug and Alcohol awareness	e-learning - 25 min	An estimated 2 million people in the UK have an addiction to some form of substance, and it's estimated that alcohol alone costs the country £21 billion. This module aims to raise your awareness of drugs and alcohol. We'll take a look at the recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption and view some useful tips for cutting back, as well as examining the more common drug types and their side effects and symptoms. We will also provide sources of support for individuals and employers, including a guide to spotting the early warning signs of substance misuse.
Healthy Lifestyle	e-learning - 15 mins	
Intro to Meditation		
Healthy Eating	Webinar	
Self Esteem	Webinar	
Self Harm Awareness		
Thrive App Demo		
Using occupation Health correctly		