

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE: 17 SEPTEMBER 2020

COVID-19 - STAFF WELLBEING UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Employment Committee of the actions taken to ensure staff wellbeing as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Staff wellbeing is a key part of the Council's People Strategy 2017-2020.

Background

3. In March 2020, the UK was placed in 'lockdown' due to the spread of coronavirus (or Covid-19). Following Government advice that people 'must' stay at home and certain businesses must close, the Council ensured that everyone who could work from home was able to do so. Staff safety and wellbeing remained a high priority and keeping workplaces secure ensured that services were still delivered to residents.

Progress to date

4. A number of key pieces of work and decisions were taken in conjunction with the Health and Safety team to ensure that workplaces were Covid-19 secure. These have included:
 - i. Changes to the layout of and accessibility to buildings (including corridors, lifts and stairwells) to ensure that social distancing can take place. Monitoring visits have then taken place to ensure compliance.
 - ii. Staff can only enter a workplace where they have permission from their Head of Service and they can only work at the desk that has been allocated to them. A refreshed induction programme was also created for those who needed to return to work to ensure that these new processes were understood.
 - iii. Meeting rooms are not available unless prior permission has been obtained.
 - iv. Limited seating has been made available in the food court to allow staff to eat away from the office. Additional seating has also been made available to provide more areas for staff breaks.
 - v. As evidence emerged suggesting certain demographic factors that could affect people's vulnerability or 'risk factors' in relation to Covid-19 health outcomes, a personal risk assessment tool was created to help identify and support individuals who may be at greater risk.

5. A staff wellbeing survey was launched in May to help understand and assess the impact that coronavirus and the lockdown was having on employees. The results from over 3,000 responses demonstrated that staff had several concerns over the economic impact of the outbreak, the health of their friends and family, plus practical issues such as the provision of technology and equipment to assist staff with working from home. These results were fed into the general recovery plans with the following specific actions being undertaken:
 - i. A one-off working from home payment of up to £200 has been made available for the purchase of necessary office equipment. This has enabled staff to continue to work from home safely.
 - ii. Over 1,000 suggestions from staff on how to help wellbeing have been shared with their colleagues. These have been pulled together into a Book of Wellbeing, which is combined with other ideas, tips, stories, quotes, images and videos and is available on the intranet for staff to access at any time.
 - iii. A Managers' Charter was developed to demonstrate how managers will support their teams, especially while working remotely, and the charter has also been embedded into Learning and Development activities.
6. Regular communications on wellbeing have been issued and shared with all staff. These have included suggestions on how to work safely from home, guidance on the potential impact of Ramadan, and they have also raised awareness of initiatives such as active travel and volunteer's week. The wellbeing support available from the Council's counselling service has also been promoted, including the network of trained Mental Health First Aiders that is available across the Council. Other wellbeing support that has been provided for staff over the last few months has included testing for essential workers.
7. In recognising the impact that Covid-19 and the lockdown has had on staff, a large variety of development sessions have been created to support the wellbeing of staff. Due to the restrictions on face-to-face meetings, virtual sessions have been delivered on topics such as managing change, resilience, mindfulness and physical activity, alongside the promotion of national NHS guidance.

Next steps

8. Wellbeing will continue to be a key focus for the Council, and its importance will be reflected within the new People Strategy. This will ensure the delivery of programmes based on 8 themes; (1) stress management, (2) bereavement, (3) anxiety, (4) depression, (5) sleep, (6) physical activity, (7) mindfulness, and (8) resilience.
9. The wellbeing survey has also now been re-launched and is due to close in October. This will enable the Council to monitor the impact of the support that has been provided to date and assess what further assistance may be required.
10. These programmes of work will build upon the current activities that are already in place to reduce sickness absence and will also ensure that support is available for those staff who are required to work from home for extended periods of time.
11. Future updates on wellbeing will be included within the regular absence management reports that are presented to the Employment Committee.

Resource Implications

12. The additional activity to support the wellbeing of staff has and will be delivered within current resources, without additional cost.

Conclusions

13. A variety of activities have been undertaken recently to enhance the level of support that is available for staff and the management of their wellbeing. This has included the provision of safe workplaces and individual risk assessments, equipment and furniture, and virtual development sessions. Plans are also in place to ensure that this excellent work is continued, and that staff wellbeing remains a key focus throughout the Council.

Recommendations

14. The Employment Committee is asked to consider and note both the actions taken so far and future next steps outlined in the report to support staff wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Background papers

15. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

16. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

17. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment will be carried out for specific policies and procedures where appropriate.

Officer to Contact

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