

<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Legal and Governance – Charlotte Benjamin
<b>Submitted to:</b>	Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee – 29 <sup>th</sup> April 2021
<b>Subject:</b>	HR Assurance Report – Health and Wellbeing

## Summary

<b>Proposed decision(s)</b>
Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee to note the report.

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Key decision:</b>	<b>Confidential:</b>	<b>Is the report urgent?<sup>1</sup></b>
Information and discussion	The decision could affect all wards within Middlesbrough Council	No	No

<b>Contribution to delivery of the 2020-23 Strategic Plan</b>		
<b>People</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Business</b>
		Development of Health and Wellbeing Plans is an effective tool in driving business efficiencies whilst supporting staff and demonstrating the council's commitment to Health and Wellbeing.

<b>Ward(s) affected</b>
All wards in Middlesbrough Council could be directly affected by the proposals set out in this report.

## **What is the purpose of this report?**

1. The aim of this report is to provide the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee with an annual review of the corporate approach to the management of Health and Wellbeing within the Council. It will also provide details of the actions in the year ahead.
2. The previous report was postponed in 2020 due to the pandemic and resources were reallocated to support staff during that difficult period. However, a presentation was provided to Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee in September 2020 to update on actions throughout the pandemic.

## **Why does this report require a Member decision?**

3. The role of the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee is to oversee corporate governance within the Council. This Annual Assurance Report supports this process and provides details of the actions that have taken place previously and plans to improve the Council's health and wellbeing arrangements moving forward.

## **Report Background**

### **Health and Wellbeing Offer**

4. The Council is currently offering the following health and wellbeing services to employees:
  - Employee Assistance Programme – this is a telephone access service that provides counselling support, legal and financial information, health advice and access to more online resources as well as the ability to speak in confidence to a third party.
  - Face to Face Counselling – this can be accessed via a manager and is a completely confidential service currently provided by Alliance Psychological Services. This service was introduced in the second half of the year in response to the pandemic.
  - MRI scanning – this can be provided if recommended by GP or Specialist Medical Practitioner and there is undue delay via the NHS. This service is currently provided by Alliance Medical.
  - Occupational Health Services which are currently delivered by Medacs. The majority of appointments have been provided over the telephone due to the pandemic but face-to-face appointments are available when required.
  - Annual Flu Vaccination programme which targets 'front-line' workers in Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
5. As an employer, the Council achieved the 'Maintaining Excellence standard in the North East Better Health at Work Awards in 2019/20. This was an increase from

‘Continuing Excellence’ in 2018/19. This was due to be reassessed in 2020 but assessment was deferred due to the pandemic.

### **Health & Wellbeing Activities Delivered in 2020/21**

6. The planned Health & Wellbeing activities in 2020/21 were significantly disrupted and had to be adapted to deal with restrictions imposed by the pandemic:

- Flu vaccines - 222 council employees were vaccinated and we facilitated vaccinations for 274 staff from maintained schools.
- 75 trained Mental Health First Aiders continued to support fellow employees and managers offering a listening and signposting service in the workplace.
- 1 day Mental Health First Aid training had to be suspended and the North East Better Health At Work ‘Maintaining Excellence’ assessment deferred.
- Health Champions/Advocates continued to provide support as best they could under the pandemic restrictions. The Council currently has a network of 25 Health Advocates.
- Induction converted to online and the HR team continued to attend (Market Place events) alongside MHFA and Health Advocates/Champions to share support available with new employees.
- Greater use was made of internal Employee Facebook page to promote services to staff.

Specific Support because of the Pandemic;

- Keyworker Letters - providing access to travel and priority for accessing food/services to stay healthy
- Financial wellbeing – provided payments to casual Workers based on average earnings to support staff and their families
- Provided equipment such as chairs and screens (delivered to home) or access to equipment (through the working From Home payment)
- In collaboration with Public Health ‘Stretch Well’ short videos were commissioned and promoted to help staff keep fit and active whilst working from home.
- Implementation of Shielding for staff
- Working from Home online Newsletters developed to engage and support staff.
- Supporting managers to support their staff via People Matters managers newsletter.

- Amendments to HR Policies to take account of the pandemic – Managing Attendance Policy and Reviews, Consultation and Redundancy Policy.

## **Health & Wellbeing 2021/22**

7. Historically the highest reason for absence is stress and mental health related issues and it is highly likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic. The Royal College of Psychiatrists have stated that issues could get a lot worse due to delays in support and that people have had to access emergency care.
8. In recognition of the impending mental health 'crisis' referred to by health professionals funding has been secured for a full time HR Business Partner for 12 months. The post will specifically focus on the health and wellbeing of staff, and deal with the predicted fallout of mental health issues because of Covid and develop a longer-term strategy for ongoing support.
9. The post holder will assess and research potential impacts, working with staff and managers; they will design/deliver/commission appropriate services working with our existing partners as well as developing new relationships.
10. They will explore digital opportunities for different types of longer-term support and will help develop a culture of wellbeing in the organisation including reviewing our current accreditations.
11. A further report with more detailed actions be brought back to committee once the post is appointed to and assessment of need has been carried out.
12. The following activities are planned to continue:-
  - Maintain the current number of Mental Health First Aiders (as a minimum of 60) and continue to hold quarterly network meetings to encourage participation.
  - Review the Mental Health First Aid (1 Day Session) for the remaining cohort of Middlesbrough Managers who have not received this training and deliver online.

## **What decision(s) are being asked for?**

13. That Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee note the report.

## **Why is this being recommended?**

14. In order that Human Resources can continue to provide the Council with guidance and continue to provide health and wellbeing advice and support to Managers and Employees tailored to their needs.

## **Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended**

N/A

## **Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)**

### **Legal**

N/A

### **Financial**

15. There are no direct financial implications of this report. Funding has already been secured for a temporary HR Business Partner post and associated costs.

### **Policy Framework**

N/A

### ***Equality and Diversity***

N/A

### ***Risk***

16. If the Council does not have an effective health and wellbeing plan this could result in high levels of sickness and absence resulting in inefficiencies and inability to deliver strategic priorities (08-026). By supporting staff and looking after their wellbeing, the Council aims to reduce the risk of stress and retain staff within the organisation (08-029).

## **Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)**

17. Human Resources will continue with the work outlined in the report and bring a further report with a detailed action plan once the new post is appointed to and the post holder has had time to assess needs.

## **Appendices**

N/A

## **Background papers**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

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