

Crawley Borough Council

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Commission

3 June 2024

Staff Health, Morale, and Sickness Updates

Report of the Head of Governance, People & Performance, *LDS/219*

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission (OSC) with a progress update following the information provided to the OSC in June 2023. The updates cover the Council workforce's health, wellbeing and sickness levels.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

That the Commission is requested to receive this report, note progress to date and acknowledge the ongoing approach.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 Under the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, updates are provided to the Commission on the Council workforce's health, wellbeing, and sickness levels. Previous reports in June and November 2021, June 2022 and 2023 presented to the OSC provided an overview of the situation and measures put in place for its workforce.

4. Current situation

- 4.1 Impact on sickness of Crawley Borough Council employees

- 4.2 For the financial year 2023/24 the top three reasons for sickness absence, recorded in the categories, were stress/depression and mental health (29%), operations, post operations and hospital appointments (12%) and other musculoskeletal (not back related) (11%). This has remained consistent when comparing to reasons for 2022/23 other than Covid absence which dropped out of the top three and being replaced with operations, post operations and hospital appointments.

- 4.3 For quarter four of 2023/2024 seven people reported a positive Covid test, which is a decrease in the number who reported for the same quarter in 2022/23. Given the significant decrease in those reporting a positive covid test we reviewed this requirement and have agreed to pause this until such time that covid sickness absences across the Council increase.

- 4.4 The winter flu vaccination programme was successful in uptake, and it will again run a programme towards the end of summer 2024.

Support to the workforce

- 4.5 The Council's offer of support to employees has continued to be made through its learning and development programme. The support facilities and resources listed in the earlier reports to OSC continue to be offered.
- 4.6 The financial cost of living crisis still has a significant impact on the workforce and the Council has issued several reminders to employees to highlight the organisations from which they can seek support, guidance and money saving tips. The Council has placed a specific focus on financial well-being and has provided workshops on this topic to help employees better understand their relationship with money. The workshops have provided strategies and tactics to improve their financial habits. Other guidance has looked at financial planning and practical knowledge on the key elements of managing everyday finances e.g. budgeting, managing debt, seeking support they are struggling.
- 4.7 For people managers and aspiring managers, the Council has almost completed the full roll out of the suite of essential training sessions for current managers. As outlined in previous reports, these sessions cover:-
- managing sickness absence;
 - discipline & grievance;
 - managing performance;
 - investigation training;
 - equality, diversity & inclusion;
 - safeguarding.

The Council will continue to offer these sessions to new managers who join the Council in the future and this programme will be developed to incorporate other people management responsibilities. Additionally going forward HR&OD will be developing a core training programme for all staff.

Sussex Training Consortium has been providing training for local government for over 10 years it provides a wide range of courses including an extensive general programme, management programmes and specialist training. Crawley is a key member of the STC in which the consortium is able to procure and share training initiatives. In terms of employee wellbeing CBC employees have been able to access workshops covering such topics as:

- Overcoming overwhelm;
 - The menopause mind;
 - Menopause demystified;
 - Practical sessions on mindfulness;
 - Personal resilience;
 - Foundation for financial well-being;
 - Foundation for personal financial planning;
 - Mental health awareness.
- 4.8 To align with the essential training for managers a review of several of the people-related policies and procedures is taking place. A suite of documents has been developed to support the reviewed policies and procedures, not just for managers but for employees involved in the process.

Wellbeing Week took place in the week commencing 11th March 2024 with events at the Town Hall and Metcalf Depot and talks covering topics associated with health, wellbeing and staff benefits. This included:

- Sleep Talk to help you get the most out of your night's sleep;
- How to use the Valued platform to help make your money go further. (Valued is the cash discount scheme for use in a number of retailers);
- Talk about domestic abuse from Safe in Sussex;
- Menopause Talk;
- Wellbeing Toolkit;
- Information from Unison, Men Walk and Talk, Payroll Giving, financial advice and support, Costco and Mental Health First Aiders;
- Relax and Breathe sessions;
- Massage taster sessions;
- Wills and Power of Attorney session.

A wellbeing toolkit was launched in March 2024 during Wellbeing Week to support managers and employees through mental health, menopause or domestic violence situations.

4.9 The wide range of wellbeing sessions offered last year are still being offered to staff through the Council's wellbeing team. These were:

- Starting the year - be kind to yourself in 2024 A guide to taking care of your mental health;
- Motivation for the year ahead - kick start 2024 with healthy eating habits;
- NHS Heart Health Check;
- Food waste - top tips to reduce food waste and how to plan weekly meals.

The team introduced blood pressure checks in February 2024, smoking cessation support which also includes those who VAPE along with alcohol and weight management programmes.

4.9 A number of mental health initiatives, that have been launched on a national or global scale, have been promoted through corporate staff global emails These were:

- World Suicide Prevention Day (10th September 2023)
- World Mental Health Day (10th October 2023)
- International Men's Day (19th November 2023)
- Stress Awareness Month (April 2024)
- Mental Health Awareness week (13th – 19th May 2024)

A number of informative webinars led by Able Futures (government funded organisations providing mental health support to people in employment) have also been promoted.

4.10 Other initiatives offered by officers within the Council include:

- Workplace Savings Scheme which enables staff to transfer money into a savings account directly from their salary;
- Pension Benefits, with AVC scheme for participants off the local government pension scheme;
- Energy at home – top tips on ways to make energy saving.

- 4.11 In December 2023 lone worker devices were rolled out to 277 employees. The devices, known as SOS Fobs, are connected to a safe hub lone worker protection system. The purpose of these devices is for an employee to alert an operative at an alarm receiving centre if they are or feel at risk whilst lone working. The device also has motion and shock sensors so if you were to fall or have an accident the alarm receiving centre would call your device to establish if you require help or assistance.
- 4.12 The Council has seen a slight decrease in the number of its workforce taking up the counselling service.
- 4.13 The Council has continued to offer the reflective practise programme for managers. This has recently been reviewed to gauge its success as well as how the service can be further promoted to encourage participation across the Council. Those who have been involved in these sessions have reported positive experiences.
The purpose of reflective practice sessions is to provide a neutral holding space for managers and teams to reflect, slow down, explore possibilities and sustain their resilience and wellbeing at work.

It provides a safe space in which participants can reflect on and manage their personal responses to the work. This contributes to a reduction in stress levels and also allows managers to pool knowledge and, in particular, to mentor others and share valuable learning. It encourages and supports decision making. The programme offers one 90 minute session per month for a maximum period of 12 months.

- 4.14 The Council has and will carry on providing ongoing support to its workforce and will continue to encourage colleagues to take up the opportunities presented to them. Whilst there is a responsibility on the Council (as employer) to ensure it exercises its duty of care to staff it is also for staff to take responsibility for themselves, take advantage of the support on offer and reach out when they are struggling.

5. Employees working in the office environment

- 5.1 All employees have now successfully settled into the New Town Hall, the Create Building. Following the move, employees' views were sought to gauge their early impressions of working in the new building and of the significant number of improvements which had been made. The top five improvements were:
- Room and floor numbering has been installed;
 - Monitors have been installed on the height adjustable desks;
 - Settings and advice has been published on the intranet so background noise can not be heard when on calls;
 - Disability friendly power-assisted doors;
 - Blinds are in place and can be adjusted from window glare and white desks;
- 5.2 In the context of a general rise in abusive behaviour from customers since the pandemic, there have been a number of more serious incidents in the town hall reception area involving abusive and violent behaviours towards staff. We take this rising threat to staff extremely seriously and as an immediate interim measure, provided some assurance for staff in the form of a physical presence by placing an SIA trained officer within reception whilst we procure a longer term service. We have internally reviewed all security aspects of our reception area, including physical structures, general layout and lines of sight and we have taken advice from the counter-terrorism advisors from the police as well; the

advice has led to some minor adjustments in layout. We have also produced and published a 'terms of entry' for the town hall, which is posted visibly within reception, stating very clearly what is and isn't acceptable behaviour within our buildings. These measures are working well.

All staff based at the Create Building have completed a revised fire evacuation training video. This was updated in January 2024 to reflect the fact we will be welcoming new external commercial tenants. These are British Airways Holiday (8th floor), Chubb (7th floor) and Varian Medical Systems (6th floor), who moved in week commencing 6th May 2024. The dates British Airways Holidays and Chubb will move in are yet to be confirmed.

6. Impacts to the externally focused workforce

- 6.1 The external workforce has continued to carry out its function and has adhered to risk assessments and guidance appropriate to specific work areas. This includes outside in public areas, in depots, handheld vibrating machinery and in work vehicles. This extended to working in bubbles, having separate rest rooms and working in vehicles with people they knew.

7 Transformation Plan

- 7.1 The Our People section of the Council's Transformation Plan emphasises its focus on improving processes and culture in relation to 1) Recruitment & Retention 2) Wellbeing and 3) Learning.
- 7.2 The Council is also committed to providing managers and employees with the right tools for the job by improving HR technology and digital systems. The intention is to increase the amount of automation so that less time is spent on administrative tasks and more time can be spend on more complex tasks and issues.

8 Next steps for the Council

- Continue to provide learning and development and support workshops appropriately to meet the needs of both employees and service delivery;
- Continue to provide and raise the profile of the support available to employees for their wellbeing, mental health and financial health;
- Actively encourage and support those who are, or who may face challenges with their mental health by suggesting the various offers in place or highlighting external agencies for them to draw upon;
- Carry on providing a range of wellbeing initiatives to suit the requirements of the workforce.

9. Background Papers.

None

Report author and contact officer:
Carron Burton, HR & OD Manager
01293 438095
carron.burton@crawley.gov.uk