

RECENT DEVELOPMENT TO ADDRESS SICKNESS ABSENCE

The information gathering session for Bradford Council Officers was held on 22 November 2018. Since then, a number of initiatives and changes have been put in place aimed at reducing sickness absence levels.

The extensive existing wellbeing offer to staff has been expanded and adapted in response to the Covid pandemic. The offer now includes:

- **A Comprehensive Staff Wellbeing Guide on Bradnet**

This includes a wide range of advice and support to help with staff's personal wellbeing, and to help them support colleagues, team members, friends and family. Topics include coping with feeling overwhelmed, exercise and eating well, dealing with isolation, difficult situations at home, mental wellbeing and coping with bereavement.

- **Your Wellbeing Matters Facebook group**

This is a relaxed and friendly space to help staff connect and have positive interactions during the coronavirus outbreak. Staff can use the group in any way that supports their own and others' wellbeing, whether to seek or offer support, or simply chat and share with colleagues from the wider council team.

- **Employee Coronavirus Helpline**

A dedicated employee helpline is in place to give staff support and advice around how coronavirus is affecting staff at work. Support provided may include giving access to practical assistance or financial advice, through to details of specialist bereavement and psychological support.

- **Fast tracked counselling for emotional support**

The Council's counselling provider can arrange counselling for a staff member who are struggling within 48 hours of a request being received at Employee Health and Wellbeing. Up to 8 sessions of counselling can be arranged, and this can be via telephone, video, or face to face dependant on the specific needs of the member of staff.

- **Shout - A Crisis Text Service**

This is an innovative service accessed by text message which helps staff who prefer to use text rather than speak out loud to talk about what is worrying them. The service is free and confidential and it offers support to anyone who is struggling with their mental health.

- **SUDDEN – A service for coping with bereavement**

Their website provides support for anyone bereaved by sudden death, and their helpline offers emotional and practical support.

- **Mental Health Awareness Week**

This promotional week was run from 18th to 22nd May and provided wellbeing information to all employees. The Wellbeing survey was launched along with a number of “bite size” learning resources. A Kindness matters video (provided by the Mental Health Foundation) was popular as was the Coronavirus Your Wellbeing Matters page on Bradnet which contains links to numerous resources to support staff wellbeing.

- **Staff Wellbeing Survey**

The wellbeing survey was designed to assess the levels of staff wellbeing and whether the wellbeing messages and initiatives were reaching all staff. In total, 1,667 people took part in the survey which is considered a good response rate in comparison to other similar surveys. The spread of the returns across the organisation was reasonably representative. The results of the survey were generally positive with 80 per cent of staff answering OK, Good or Very Good to the question "How would you rate your mental wellbeing right now?". However, the following areas were identified as the most significant in causing concern to staff:

- Effective, supportive and regular contact from immediate and senior managers.
- Flexible working practices to be maintained including understanding of personal circumstances. BME staff in particular wanted to continue working from home and not to be “forced” back.
- Effective provision of IT to enable working remotely.

The outcomes of the survey are part of a report to be considered with proposals to address these areas.

- **Management Training**

Around 50 workshops have been provided to managers to help them to develop their management skills in better managing their staff including absence management. These interactive, 3 day workshops have been attended by over 500 managers. 11 of these workshops took place after the information gather session for Council staff on 22 November 2018.

- **Network of Wellbeing Support**

A network of Employee Wellbeing Champions has been established across the Council which has been effective in disseminating wellbeing information to staff and acting as a point of contact to signpost staff to appropriate resource.

- **In-house HR Advisory**

- Following the decision by Executive to bring this service back in house, work has begun on the pulling together of a project group to lead the implementation of this. Work on this project will start at pace very shortly, with clear workstreams outlined and subsequent leads appointed. Workstreams will run simultaneously, with regular meetings to ensure progress and highlighted milestones are met.
- As part of this process, one of the project groups workstreams will involve analysis of how the management of sickness absence within the organisation can be improved and streamlined to ensure a more robust approach, in an effort to seek improved sickness absence levels, through improved management and oversight.
- HR colleagues will play a key role in this, through the development of refined policies (in consultation with key stakeholders within the organisation) in relation to sickness absence, providing a more 'hands on' approach in providing advice to managers in service areas and also monitoring the implementation of the revised policies through regular updates and case conferences with management to ensure a timely, efficient and consistent approach to sickness management within the organisation. HR will work with senior management within the organisation to ensure management compliance and consistency of policy adoption.
- New systems will be introduced to not only allow the accurate recording of sickness absence and highlighting of relevant trigger points reached by staff members, but will also provide valuable management information that can be used by HR colleagues to work with services to ensure a consistent approach and service specific approaches to the managing of staff absence.
- The new systems and processes, will allow clear and productive links between all relevant areas within HR, that are involved in supporting both staff and management, including HR advisory services, employee health and wellbeing and occupational safety, as well as our external partners.