

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 6TH JULY 2022
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: LAWRENCE HOWARD

SUBJECT: MENTAL HEALTH REPORT - 6 MONTH UPDATE,
JULY 2022

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an update in respect of the work that is ongoing in respect of Mental Health and provides insight regarding upcoming work.

Recommended:

- [1] Members review and consider the information presented in this report.

Background

2. The post of Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor was introduced into the Service in July 2019, following the recommendation of the Staff Engagement Forum and approval by the Fire Authority.
3. The Service's first ever Mental Health Strategy was approved by the Fire Authority in January 2021. This was developed by the Mental Health Steering Group (MHSG) following consultations across the Service. The Strategy provides strategic direction and clear aims for the Service to ensure sufficient emphasis is placed around mental health to give it parity of esteem with physical health. The Strategy also incorporates the wider notion of the Service's values and its links to the wider communities it serves and aims to support the Service's ambition to become an employer of choice and a beacon of excellence in mental health.
4. An Action Plan was produced by the MHSG and was signed off on the 2 June 2021. The MHSG is monitoring and supporting the progression of the Action Plan.

Progress over the last 6 Months

5. Despite the ongoing challenges of the Pandemic, the MHSG has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. After almost 2 years of being established and meeting virtually, the MHSG was able to meet for the first time face-to-face in May 2022. The MHSG took this opportunity for a group photograph to support an article in the Alert reminding staff of the role of the MHSG.

6. The revised TRiM process and procedure has been in place for approximately two years and the number of TRiM practitioners now stands at 50 across the Service.
7. During the last six months, a project team was set up to undertake a review of the TRiM process. The review was commissioned by the MHSG with the task of looking at the take-up levels of the TRiM offer and to identify how the Service can ensure the programme is promoted and delivered effectively. The initial draft recommendations were reported back to the MHSG in January 2022 and as a result a pilot project has been launched in Cheshire East to further develop our understanding of what is required and the strength of our proposed solution.
8. In addition to TRiM, the Service has also maintained its appetite to grow the network of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs). Currently the Service has 27 Mental Health First Aiders. Their last refresher day was the 28th April 2022.
9. The aim is to significantly increase these numbers year on year. Following the completion of the September 2022 training session, the Service will have 43 MHFAs. Further dates are being planned in conjunction with the external trainers for the Prince's Trust team and other staff members.
10. In January 2022 the Service noted that suicide rates were rising within Cheshire communities. The most significant area of increase was in men aged 45 to 55 years and they remain the most vulnerable group. As a Service, we have several staff who fall within this demographic. With this in mind work has commenced to develop a Suicide Prevention Toolkit supported by training for staff in accredited Suicide First Aid training.
11. The Wellbeing Community Group continues to offer informal and flexible support. It remains based around a Facebook group that individuals can join and engage with as they please. The Group offers socially distanced walks, meditation, and a variety of wellbeing activities. There are currently over 70 staff members on this Group.
12. Another area that has been discussed at the MHSG is widening the offer of the Sports and Welfare Association. Historically the Committee's main focus has been around physical activities which is not deemed to be entirely inclusive. In an attempt to provide a wider range of activities the MHSG have offered to assist, and two members of the MHSG have joined the Sports and Welfare Association.
13. The Service celebrated World Mental Health Day in October 2021. From those celebrations the bespoke "Cheshireopoly" board game which prompted discussion around mental health themes is now available within Learning and Development for use during inductions and other development programmes within the Service.
14. Of note was the development of a mosaic to mark World Mental Health Day 2021. This idea was progressed based on the experience of one of the MHSG members who had articulated how mosaic making had had a

positive impact on her mental health during lockdown. The design below was chosen through consultation with the Wellbeing Community Group and the MHSG and the mosaic was developed at Sadler Road during Mental Health Week 2021.



15. The black tiles represent the distress associated with poor mental health and are framed by bright colours and patterns that remind us there are many positive ways to maintain our well-being. The mosaic, mounted on the wall outside the canteen at Sadler Road, was unveiled on the 15th March 2022 by the Chair of the Fire Authority, Cllr Bob Rudd in the presence of Cllr Gina Lewis, Mental Health Champion, the Chief Fire Officer and members of the MHSG.
16. Other Mental Health events and campaigns hosted during the last six months included:
 - A “Time to Talk” campaign in February 2022, encouraging staff to take time to talk to each other over a cup of tea. The aim being to encourage staff to make time to get to know and support each other.
 - A Four Week Stress Management Programme running throughout April to mark National Stress Awareness month. Weekly stress management sessions were hosted in addition to information and signposting relating to stress issues published in the Green and on the Intranet.
 - Webinars provided in May to mark Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week’. During this week the Service also joined with the Perinatal Mental Health Partnership and Motherwell, a Crewe based charity run by women for women. There were different themes each day throughout the week and daily webinars on Maternal Mental Health topics. With Motherwell, the service provided information and signposting to events available nationwide marking Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week.
 - During Mental Health Awareness Week the Service also signposted staff to a range of activities and events run by Mind and the Mental Health Foundation throughout the week.

- During June the Service supported National Carer's Week in conjunction with Carers UK. All events were promoted through the Intranet, the weekly Green and the monthly Alert.
17. Mental Health and Wellbeing awareness has also continued to be promoted through Inductions, the Step-Up programme, the Step-In programme, and the Apprentice programmes.
 18. The Mental Health Advisor has continued to be visible making, at least one visit to every watch, section, department, and team across the Service each year. This averages approximately 110 visits. At the beginning of the year, the Mental Health Advisor partnered with the Service Fitness Advisor to start offering joint visits. This is to emphasise the parity of esteem between physical and mental health. Whilst the Fitness Advisor runs the fitness test, those being tested can also have a Mental Health MOT if they wish.
 19. Over the course of the last six months the Mental Health Advisor has continued to support and attend staff network groups, Limitless; Firepride; REACH; Armed Forces Network; and the Neurodiversity Network. On the 18th May 2022 a new network was launched in the form of a Fathers Group at the request of male staff who are parents and/or new fathers looking for a peer support network.

Priorities for the Next 6 Months

20. The TRiM review pilot project will be supported in Cheshire East and an interim evaluation will be prepared for consideration by the MHSG at the October 2022 meeting. Recommendations from the review will be added to the Mental Health Action Plan for implementation.
21. Further TRiM Refresher Days and TRiM open sessions are being scheduled from the Autumn through to April next year to raise awareness and promote the offer.
22. Further work is planned to continue to support and develop the fathers/parenting network. This will provide advice and support and a safe space for new and existing fathers to discuss issues relating to home and family life.
23. Work is being planned to scope the viability of launching a Carers network within the Service. The Police have a network called 'Enable' which may provide an opportunity to collaborate on the provision of support to Carers rather than setting up an independent network just for Fire.
24. The Mental Health Advisor's Station and Department visits will continue to maintain visibility. It is planned that this cycle of approximately 110 visits will be completed by mid-March 2023 and these will continue to be done in tandem with the Fitness Advisor this year. After 12 months of joint visits an evaluation will be undertaken to determine the extent to which the messaging and the commitment to achieve parity of esteem between mental health and physical health has impacted on staff.

25. In support of this planning has also commenced for a series of events and a conference to be held in October to mark International Mental Health Day. The theme currently being explored to make the link between mental and physical health is “Mind and Body”. As in previous years, all staff will be encouraged to engage in some mindful activity relation to both their mental and physical health during this period. The date of the conference is Monday 10th October 2022. All Members of the Fire Authority are very welcome to attend.
26. The programme of Suicide First Aid training will continue, the next date being the 14th July 2022. It is proposed to launch the internal Service Suicide Prevention Toolkit during July 2022 to supplement the suicide prevention framework within the Service.
27. As part of the “Step Away” element of the new People Strategy, the Service intends to improve the support offered to staff both before and after retirement. With loneliness being a factor for many retirees, the Mental Health Advisor is considering the viability of establishing a periodic alumni gathering for retirees to encourage ongoing friendships and to provide an opportunity for interaction with ex-colleagues.

Legal Implications

28. The Service recognises its legal duties to tackling stress and anxiety which could lead to mental ill health. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) expects the Service to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments and to take action to tackle any problems identified.
29. The HSE risk management standards have been incorporated into the new appraisal process to facilitate discussions on an individual basis and to help identify any risks.

Equality and Diversity Implications

30. Equality and diversity is closely aligned with mental health. This includes making reasonable adjustments for staff with a mental health condition, protecting the privacy of a staff member who has a mental health condition, and ensuring that we do not take any adverse action against a staff member because of a mental health condition. Mental Health is now included as a factor for consideration within the Service’s Equality Impact Assessment process.
31. More recently there has been an emphasis on the ageing workforce due to greater life expectancy. Based on workforce planning predictions it is inevitable that there will be an increase of staff in older age groups. This places more emphasis on the need to create a healthy workforce to sustain an older population of staff who may have greater health needs in the workplace.

Environmental Implications

32. None

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE