

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE.
DATE: 1ST MARCH 2023
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: LAWRENCE HOWARD

SUBJECT: ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH REPORT 2022

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides an update in respect of the work that has been undertaken over the last 12 months to deliver the objectives and priorities contained within the Service's Mental Health Strategy.

Recommended: That

[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. The Mental Health Strategy comprises of four key elements:

1	Leadership and Responsibility	We believe that mental health is everyone's responsibility and requires visible commitment from all staff across the Service, regardless of role or pay grade.
2	Communication and Education	We believe that the key to maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is through a systematic programme of engagement, promotion, and education.

3	Support and Intervention	We will continue to support and intervene to improve mental health and are committed to increasing organisational confidence, skills and capability in addressing risks and dealing with mental health issues.
4	Culture and Compassion	We believe an open and compassionate culture around mental health is essential to eliminating stigma and promoting a positive environment that reduces the exacerbation of existing mental health problems and concerns.

- An Action Plan was produced by the MHSB and was signed off on the 2 June 2021. The MHSB is monitoring and supporting the progression of the Action Plan and meets on a quarterly basis. The information contained below provides an update against the key areas contained within the Mental Health Strategy and the corresponding action plan.

Information

Leadership and Responsibility

- One of the ways in which the Service has been normalising mental health is through regular engagement with staff and through maintaining regular dialogue with line managers about stress and the mental wellbeing of staff. Senior officers are also expected to demonstrate a visible, active commitment and to speak openly about mental health in the workplace whilst inviting feedback on how the Service can continue to provide support. An example of this is the priority that the new Chief Fire Officer, Alex Waller, put on mental health in his first video to staff. He made a direct reference to mental health and pledged his ongoing commitment to improving and supporting the mental health of staff within the workplace.
- Over the course of the year other senior leaders have also actively supported events and activities relating to mental health such as the World Mental Health Day conference and the launch of the mental health mosaic. The ACFO and Member Champion for Mental Health have also been involved in the initial planning for a revised sports and social club and a new wellbeing and healthy living campaign that was launched in the summer of 2022.
- 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 March 2022, the Mental Health Advisor partnered with the Service Fitness Advisor to start offering joint visits. This was to emphasise the parity of esteem between physical and mental health. While the Fitness Advisor ran the fitness test, staff were also invited to undertake a Mental Health MOT. To date, 25% of staff have accessed the MOT. In March 2023, 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.

9. Ahead of the potential industrial action, the Service has also engaged with the representative bodies to encourage an environment where people have the freedom to choose whether to go on strike or not without fear of recrimination. Whilst clearly the Service and the FBU have different outlooks in this regard, discussions have taken place to agree a joint statement with the FBU which will reduce the likelihood of any inappropriate or coercive behaviour which, in turn, could exacerbate stress and anxiety. The Service is very keen to remove any judgement around individuals' right to strike or not to strike and this work is ongoing.

Communication and Education

10. It is vital to educate staff about why good mental health is important, to understand trends and to provide access to training to increase knowledge and better equip employees to deal with their own mental health concerns and/or support colleagues.
11. 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. With many employees in this demographic and with the ongoing aim to maintain zero suicides within CFRS, the Service developed and launched a Suicide Prevention Toolkit in September 2022. This was also supported by training for staff in accredited Suicide First Aid training. To date, 96 members of staff have voluntarily accessed this training.
12. As part of the "Step Away" element of the new People Strategy, the Service has been working towards improving the support offered to staff both before and after retirement. With loneliness being a factor for many retirees, the Mental Health Advisor, in conjunction with HR, is in the process of establishing a periodic alumni gathering for retirees to encourage ongoing friendships and to provide an opportunity for interaction with ex-colleagues. Work is already underway with focus groups and some individual consultations have taken place. It is expected that this will be launched within the next 6 months.
13. Over the last year the Mental Health Advisor has continued to support and attend staff network groups, Limitless; Firepride; REACH; Armed Forces Network; and Divergence, the Neurodiversity Network. The Mental Health Advisor has also facilitated sessions on the possible mental health challenges faced by members of a specific network.
14. In terms of the ongoing education, the Mental Health Advisor has a monthly column in the Alert and uses the weekly Green to promote mental health themes, events, and support. A reminder that art, craft, exercise and enjoying nature can be positive for our mental health, is the mosaic, mounted on the wall outside the canteen at Sadler Road. This 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.



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.

15. To further promote understanding and awareness of mental health issues, a mental health awareness e-learning package was launched in December 2022. The package aims to raise awareness of mental health conditions and concerns and describes and signposts staff to the support offered across the service. This is a mandatory e-learning package that will also be incorporated into the induction checklist for all new starters.
16. Other Mental Health events and campaigns hosted during the year included:
 - A “Time to Talk” campaign in February 2022.
 - A Four Week Stress Management Programme running throughout April 2022 to mark National Stress Awareness month.
 - Webinars provided in May 2022 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.
 - Support for National Carer’s Week in conjunction with Carers UK
 - Marking World Suicide Prevention Day (Saturday 10th September 2022) by reminding staff of the Suicide Prevention Toolkit and how to access the Suicide First Aid training.
 - A conference was held at Sadler Road to mark International Men’s Day.
 - “Time to Talk campaign, February 2023.

Support and Intervention

17. Significant provision is already in place, but work is continuing to ensure that the Service can offer comprehensive support to staff in a range of ways.
18. The MHSG have continued to explore how to enhance the TRiM process and have determined that there is a strong case for the proactive deployment of peer TRiM practitioners routinely following a serious or untoward incident. This is currently being piloted in Cheshire East to further develop our understanding of what is required and the strength of the proposed solution. The TRiM pilot project in Cheshire East will conclude in March 2023 followed by an evaluation

report for consideration by the MHSG. Any agreed recommendations from the review will be added to the Mental Health Action Plan for implementation.

19. The number of TRiM practitioners currently stands at 42 across the Service. Refresher days have been delivered twice a year to support and sustain TRiM practitioners' competence. Trim Refresher Days and TRiM open sessions are scheduled for 2023 to raise awareness and promote the offer.
20. In addition to TRiM, the Service has also maintained its appetite to grow the network of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAs). The number of qualified Mental Health First Aiders currently stands at 36 across the service. Further work is planned to continue to support and develop our MHFAs. There will be refresher days and the option for others to obtain this qualification. 2023 refresher days are available twice in the coming year to support and sustain MHFAs competence.
21. 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 walks, meditation, and a variety of wellbeing activities. There are currently over 70 staff members on this Group.
22. Another area that has been discussed at the MHSG is widening the offer of the Sports and Welfare Association. Historically the Association's focus has been around physical activities which is not deemed to be entirely inclusive. To provide a wider range of activities the MHSG have offered to assist, and two members of the MHSG have joined the Association.
23. The next meeting of the Stay-Well Group will be held on Wednesday 22nd February. They have been scheduled to be conducted quarterly for the rest of 2023. The Stay-Well Group is comprised of Cheshire Fire and Rescue stakeholders who are engaged in activities to support and promote the organisation's wellness programme.
24. The Group support the wellness programme through advertising of its programme content and promoting inclusion to improve employees' job satisfaction and quality of life.
25. The team was progressing the rollout of the Firefighter Charity wellbeing session. This hit some snags due to IT issues during CFRS switch between Skype and Microsoft Teams. These snags are now resolved, and Mike Donnan is trailing some of the session prior to them being rolled out to all CFRS operational and non-operational staff from February 2023. Session will be arranged by OPA admin team.
26. Corporate comms is currently producing an intranet page about the Group to promote wellbeing. This will go live in Spring 2023.
27. The core members of the group will be refined before the February meeting, as several staff have shown an interest in being involved further.

28. Following the Feb meeting, and moving into Spring and Summer, the Group will become more visible in publications and events to deliver the message and events it has been set up to promote to staff.

Culture and Compassion

29. The achievement and maintenance of a healthy and supportive culture and work environment is reliant on good leadership and a consistent and positive approach to staff wellbeing. It is also dependant on both staff and managers adhering to the Service's core values.
30. Changing culture is a long and challenging process, but through the range of interventions, communications, and ongoing efforts to engage staff in discussions around mental health, we continue to raise awareness and are making progress towards achieving a culture where staff feel it is safe to talk and know that they are being listened to.
31. Part of this approach is incorporating consideration of mental health within every policy and within all change management processes so that there is an absence of discrimination. To facilitate this, wellbeing has now been incorporated into the Equality Impact Assessment process.
32. Providing feedback is another means of achieving a positive and open culture where discussions around mental health are normalised. As already stated, there is a wellbeing section within the appraisal and all managers are expected to check the welfare of both individuals and staff groups during meetings and visits. Wellbeing has also been incorporated as a key theme within the Chief's staff engagement framework and will continue to be a topical theme of discussion on staff engagement days and within future staff surveys.
33. The "Who do I turn to" campaign is in the process of being refreshed and will be re-launched during the Spring 2023 to remind staff of the zero tolerance of discrimination and the support available.
34. Mental Health and Wellbeing awareness also continues to be promoted through Inductions, the Step-In programme, the Step-Up programme, and the Apprentice programmes.

Financial Implications

35. By having a dedicated Mental Health Advisor, the Service has made a financial investment coupled with the cost of training for staff and hosting of events. This has been built into the base budget and now considered as business as usual. It is considered that this investment in the short term will generate savings and greater productivity in the medium to long term through a reduction in the levels of absence associated directly with mental health concerns.

Legal Implications

36. The Service recognises the need to tackle 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.
37. The HSE risk management standards have also been incorporated into the new appraisal process to facilitate discussions on an individual basis and to help identify any risks.

Equality and Diversity Implications

38. Equality and diversity are 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.
39. 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

40. There are no environmental implications associated with the contents of this report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE