

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 21 JULY 2021
REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF TRANSFORMATION
AUTHOR: LAWRENCE HOWARD

SUBJECT: MENTAL HEALTH - 6 MONTH UPDATE REPORT 2021

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an overview of key mental health developments within the Service and to highlight upcoming work.

Recommended: That

- [1] Members note the report and highlight any issues that they wish to discuss further, or require clarification upon.

Background

2. The Service is acutely aware that in today's increasingly complex and fast-paced world there is a general concern about the pressures in people's lives that can have an impact on mental health and wellbeing. There is also a recognition that the nature of our Service is such that firefighters and fire staff may be exposed to traumatic and challenging situations. In view of this, the Service made a commitment to ensuring that mental health would be treated with the same level of passion and drive as it affords to physical health.
3. This commitment manifested itself in the Fire Authority approving the establishment of a permanent Mental Health Advisor post in 2019 and thereafter the approval of a Mental Health Strategy in December 2020.
4. A Mental Health Steering Group (MHSG) has also been established to oversee the delivery of the Mental Health Strategy and to support the Service's aspiration to become a beacon of excellence in this area. The terms of reference for this Group are attached at Appendix A to this report.
5. The commitment to making mental health a corporate priority will enable the Service to maintain a workforce that is mentally fit and it will help staff to function effectively in their roles with a positive sense of connection with others.

Progress over the last 6 months

6. In October 2020 the inaugural meeting of the newly formed MHSG took place. The group, which comprises of a cross section of staff from across the Service, is chaired by the Director of Transformation and supported by the Fire Authority Mental Health Champion. The MHSG has met three times to-date and is very invested in monitoring and helping to develop the Service's future mental health and wellbeing plans.
7. The MHSG was highly instrumental in the development of the service's first Mental Health Strategy. Since the Strategy was approved by the Fire Authority in December 2020, the MHSG has also helped to draft an action plan which will be used to monitor the progress and delivery of the Strategy. It is expected that the final draft of the Mental Health Action Plan will be approved at the next MHSG scheduled for July 2021.
8. The revised TRiM process and procedure has been in place for approximately eighteen months and the number of TRiM practitioners now stands at 55 across the Service. There is a longer-term aspiration to have one TRiM practitioner per station, or watch and further training courses have been planned to increase the number to 71 this year. A TRiM refresher course has also been scheduled for existing practitioners later this year.
9. At the last meeting the MHSG commissioned a review of the TRiM process. The review will look specifically at the take-up levels of the TRiM offer and will ensure the programme is promoted and delivered effectively.
10. Alongside the TRiM offer, the Service has also invested in developing Mental Health First Aiders and to-date there are 16 Mental Health First Aiders within the Service. Further training had been scheduled for earlier this year but had to be rescheduled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Similar to the TRiM practitioners there is an appetite to develop a wider network of Mental Health First Aiders across the service and upon completion of the rescheduled two training courses, there will be 48 qualified Mental Health First Aiders in service.
11. Whilst the Service has embarked upon offering structured opportunities in mental health education, requests for more informal and flexible ways of engaging with the mental health agenda have been forthcoming from staff. Following discussions across the service a Wellbeing Community Group has been set up to address this need. This group operates largely around social media as a Facebook group but more recently, the activities have extended to socially distanced face-to-face activities such as group walks, meditation and other wellbeing activities such as yoga. The Wellbeing Community Group is a staff led initiative that links in with the MHSG and currently has a membership of approximately 70 members from within the Service.
12. Representatives of the Service's Sports and Welfare Committee attended the most recent MHSG to highlight on the potential linkages to the Service's mental health agenda. It was considered that there is scope to extend the current offering within the Sports and Welfare Committee and several individuals from

the MHSG have volunteered to support a potential relaunch of the Sports and Welfare Committee and act as the link between the two groups.

13. In support of the Strategy's intent to provide a consistent programme of engagement around mental health, a key focus for the Mental Health Advisor has been promotion and education. This has been done via the intranet with a dedication section on Mental Health and a series of campaigns and events. These include the following:
- January 2021 – Webinar “New Year Blues”
 - February 2021 – Time to Talk Mental Health Campaign
 - March 2021 – Eating Disorders Awareness & World Bipolar Day
 - April 2021 – Recognition of Stress Awareness Month
 - May 2021 – Maternal Mental Health Awareness & #Speak you Mind campaign

All events are promoted through the intranet, the weekly Green and there is a dedicated monthly column on Mental Health in the Alert publication.

14. The visibility of the Mental Health Advisor has been a key factor in promoting and educating staff around the service's commitment to positive mental health. During his first year the Mental Health Advisor made at least one visit to every watch, section, department and team across the service. Since the outbreak of the pandemic these have been taking place via Skype although subject to the lifting of restrictions in July 2021, these will return to being 'in person' visits.
15. In addition between October 2020 and February 2021, the Mental Health Advisor accompanied HR colleagues on 110 Attendance Management and Wellbeing Roadshow visits, sharing the new Attendance and Wellbeing Policy and guidance. This also gave the opportunity to discuss concerns relating to the Pandemic and enabled the Mental Health Advisor to showcase a number of documents that had been developed during the Pandemic to help staff maintain positive mental health. This included a Post Covid-19 return to work and Safe Workplace Guide.
16. To ensure parity between mental and physical health it has been important for the Mental Health Advisor to link in regularly with the Fitness Advisor and the Health and Safety Advisor and the training department. The Mental Health Advisor also maintains links with external individuals and agencies and is part of the Joint Emergency Services mental health group and CWaC Suicide Prevention Group. Other links are with Able Futures: the Richmond Fellowship, Mid Cheshire Mind etc.
17. The Mental Health Advisor also supports the Staff Network Groups and has been instrumental in the launch of several new policies, training events and e-learning packages. These include the new Menopause Policy and stress management awareness. He has an ongoing commitment and input on all leadership development programmes, induction programmes and apprentice and Princes Trust programmes.

18. Following a review of the appraisal process, a new section on Wellbeing has been introduced that will help to normalise conversations around mental health and highlight potential concerns of staff. The new section of the appraisal is based on the Health and Safety Executive risk assessment standards and can be seen at Appendix B.
19. In late June a campaign will be held in conjunction with the Police to acknowledge "Carers Week". This will be the platform for the launch of a Carers network within the fire service. The police have 'Enable' and they are hoping to support our Carers network. This group is in response to a number of requests from staff for the Service to offer more support and guidance to Carers.

Priorities for Next 6 Months.

20. With the imminent relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions it is expected that many staff will return to the physical workplace, potentially with some trepidation. A key priority will be to re-engage with staff, allay fears and to reinforce the Service's commitment to providing a safe workplace. Materials are currently being developed for staff in the form of guidance documents and an intranet based campaign will be launched during July.
21. When Covid-19 conditions permit, training will be rebooked and delivered. TRiM training (x1) and Mental Health First Aider training (x2). TRiM refresher training will be offered and delivered. The TRiM review will also be undertaken as agreed by the Mental Health Steering Group.
22. The Mental Health Advisor is already plugged into the networks and this involvement will continue. Following the joint work with Limitless and a Crewe based charity Motherwell work will commence to support the development of a Fathers Group in response to staff requests and a recent staff suggestion.
23. Work has commenced on planning for this year's World Mental Health Day (10th October 2021). This is a Sunday and the Service will mark the event starting Monday, 11th October 2021 and events and activities will be encouraged throughout the week. The Service will host a half day conference on Wednesday, 13th October 2021. Other upcoming events being planned for during the next six months are World Suicide Prevention Day (10th September 2021); Movember and Men's Health Day (19th November 2021).
24. A mosaic has been commissioned for the new training centre which will depict mental wellbeing. This is being led by a member of the MHSG who shared her interest of creating mosaics as a wellbeing activity during lockdown. A design has been chosen through consultation with the Wellbeing Community Group and the MHSG. Work on this project will start this summer.
25. The MHSG will review and approved the Action Plan and start to monitor and develop actions. The Mental Health Advisor will also commence face to face station and department visits.
26. Further work has been planned to ensure the intranet pages associated with mental health are up to date, compelling and comprehensive.

27. Work will continue on the development of a Wellbeing Impact Assessment to ensure that all programmes of change and policies consider mental health in the same way as equality and diversity is considered.

Legal Implications

28. The Service recognises its legal duty towards its staff. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) expects it to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments and to take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment. A Wellbeing Impact Assessment is being designed to undertake risk assessments relating to organisational and policy changes and the HSE Management Standards have been incorporated into the new appraisal process to facilitate discussions on an individual basis.

Equality and Diversity Implications

29. 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.
30. 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

31. There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, Governance and Corporate Planning Manager
TEL 07776 297806**

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix A – Mental Health Steering Group, Terms of Reference
Appendix B – Step Forward Appraisal Review