WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

STAFFING POLICY COMMITTEE
9th September 2015

Workplace Health Update

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the progress of the Workplace Health project and to set out a broad overview of short and medium term plans.

Background

2. The Workplace Health project is aimed at raising awareness of workplace health issues and influencing the management of those health risks both by managers and by individual members of staff. Inherent within these goals in the achievement of accreditation for the nationally recognised Workplace Well-Being Charter.

3. The potential for savings is presented by an impact upon the costs associated with annual sickness absence. An improved performance would also impact upon service delivery, recruitment and retention and the broad sense of personal well-being and morale.

4. Over a quarter of all recorded absence is due to some form of stress-related/mental health issue.

5. The principal objective is to achieve a shift in individual and corporate behaviours which perpetuate to become norms of behaviour. This will further establish a workplace culture in which preventative health management is embraced and embedded as good management practice.

Main Considerations for the council

6. The progress to date has been as per the scheduled project plan and includes:
    a. A staff survey of health issues to establish baseline data and help focus priorities;
    b. Publication of survey data to staff and, by service area, to Associate Directors and Heads of Service;
    c. Preliminary assessment of current position against accreditation standards by external independent assessor;
    d. Creation of webpages for each standard giving broad information and signposting to support services;
    e. Commissioning of two e-learning modules aimed at raising staff awareness of Mental Health and Misuse of Alcohol;
    f. Creation of a 'menu' of intervention options for management teams to consider;
    g. Series of events at each Hub to formally launch the project.

7. The next phase will see service areas evaluate their survey results and be invited to identify areas for development. It is expected that some interventions will be achieved by action within individual teams whilst others will involve direct support from the Occupational Health and Safety Service who, in turn, will co-ordinate support from other Public Health Specialist Services and/or external providers.

8. A series of health promotion opportunities and campaigns to raise awareness of some key health topics will be offered along with information, advice and guidance on how staff can improve their health through alternative lifestyle choices. These will be valuable tools of change but it is important that not too much emphasis is put solely on the provision of such additional opportunities and services. The greater business benefits will be achieved through the collective gains from better management of staff absences and the consistent application of corporate policy and procedures linked to employee well-being.

9. One area of particular prioritisation is the topic of mental health. There will be a strong emphasis within the Workplace Health project to raise the awareness of common mental health conditions and to reduce or remove the workplace stigma associated with the disclosure of mental distress, anxiety or stress, and any associated formal diagnosis.

10. The mental health strand of the project will use strategies including e-learning, individual and group well-being risk assessments, online signposting, occupational health assessments and bespoke management training to improve understanding and confidence.

11. It is hoped that there will be opportunities for a degree of innovation and 'left field' thinking too. A preliminary trial of standing desks is one good example of how new thinking can potentially have a small and direct influence on the mind-set of employees to reduce sedentary behaviour.

12. The first opportunity for Charter accreditation will be Spring 2016. It is possible that the Council could ultimately become an accreditation centre for other employers in Wiltshire.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

13. Success in influencing behaviour to adopt sustainable travel plans and increase walking and cycling as alternatives to car journeys will have a positive environmental impact.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

14. One indicator of the success of the project will be the extent of any impact within any of the traditionally harder-to-reach demographic groups. These will include those with high BMI, lower income, poor mental health and other higher risk health categories. Some interventions will specifically target these groups, and attention will be paid to including all staff groups and not privileging those who are based in the 3 main sites.

Risk Assessment

15. The key risk may actually be that of the missed opportunity to positively affect the health and well-being of employees by deviating from the project's objectives. Baseline survey data and the scale of the financial loss associated with health related absences and service disruption suggest that gains are likely to be achievable and significant.

16. Care will be required to manage any reputational risk linking expenditure of 'taxpayers' money' to 'soft' personal health and fitness interventions outside of the norm of public expectations.

Financial Implications

17. PriceWaterhouseCoopers reported that for every £1 spent on workplace wellbeing at least £1 was recouped, with the most successful interventions yielding up to £84 for every £1 spent. [PriceWaterhouseCoopers 'Building the Case for Wellness' 2008]

Recommendation

18. The Committee is encouraged to continue to support and endorse the Workplace Health project.

Frances Chinemana
Associate Director, Public Health

Report Author: Paul Collyer, Head of Occupational Health and Safety

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None