Safety & Wellbeing

Policy Arrangement

Section 34 – Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing

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Schedule 1 – Impact Assessments

Further guidance on this matter can also be obtained from the safety team at
healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk

Section 34 – Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing

1. Introduction

The actions of managers and supervisors continue to be key in the Council's efforts to minimise the risk of injury to employees and others using Council services. In relation to supporting the mental health of employees, managers should be comfortable integrating the following key actions into their team's procedures.

Mental health is one of the most important issues facing employers and employees. A recent study carried out by the University of Strathclyde on behalf of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), reported that employees take, on average, 21 days for each mental health-related sickness absence spell.

It is estimated that between 15 and 30% of employees will experience mental health problems in any one year, and virtually anyone is susceptible. With 2.4 million employees in Scotland, this would suggest that as many as 700,000 people will experience mental health problems at work. North Lanarkshire Council recognises the benefits of actively managing this area of ill health.

The Council is committed to securing a healthy workforce by placing value on both physical and mental health and wellbeing. The Council acknowledges that mental health difficulties have many causes, which may include the workplace.

Whilst the Council has no control over external or personal factors, it is committed, where possible, to managing risks which are within its control.

2. Statement

North Lanarkshire Council will actively:

a) Promote mental health and wellbeing for all employees, through its management policies, support services, information networks and regular health promotion campaigns (including alcohol awareness, healthy eating, exercise), and by liaising appropriately with external agencies;

b) Identify and prevent, so far as is practicable, those circumstances detrimental to mental health and wellbeing of those employed by North Lanarkshire Council; and

c) Provide an environment in which employees who have mental health difficulties receive suitable support and reasonable adjustments to their work circumstances.

This intent applies to all employees of North Lanarkshire Council, regardless of age, gender, marital status, ethnic origin, disability, and sexual orientation.

3. Ambition of the Council

Through application of this arrangement, the Council aims to:

a) Encourage employees' mental health and wellbeing and discourage the stigma unfairly attached to mental health difficulties;

b) Raise awareness of ill health associated with mental health and wellbeing, its causes and associated factors;

c) Endeavour to identify and tackle organisational issues, raised through the risk assessment process, that act negatively on the mental health of employees;

d) Provide assistance to employees experiencing mental health problems;

e) Remove barriers to employment by supporting the terms of the Employment and Retention of Individuals with a Disability;

f) Offer access to counselling , systems of support and other professional help;

g) Make sure there is confidentiality for those who want help;

h) Encourage the use of existing policies, so far as is reasonably practicable, to offer reassurance and support to affected employees.

4. Legislation and Interaction with Related Council Policies and Guidance Notes

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy interacts with, and refines, several established policies. Additionally, the Council's Duty of Care towards its employees is determined by legislation such as: -

- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Human Rights Act 1998.
- Data Protection Act 1998.
- Disability & Equality Act 2010
- Employment Relations Act 1999.
- Working Time Regulations 2003
- Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2004
- Equality Act 2010

Associated Policies include:

- Managing Attendance
- Alcohol and Drug Related Problems
- Discipline
- Employment and Retention of Individuals with a Disability
- Equality & Diversity in Employment Policy

- Flexible Workstyle
- Grievance
- Harassment
- Special Leave
- Maternity Provisions
- Stress at Work

These policies are readily available on CONNECT or from the Service's HR team.

5.   Definitions and Terminology

Mental Health Difficulties

The term "mental health difficulties" encompasses a wide range of experiences ranging from short-term depression and anxiety through to diagnosed long term mental ill health.

It is important to avoid the use of language that stigmatises the individual and may deter employees from accessing the support available. The inappropriate use of terms, which might mislead and label unnecessarily, must be avoided. The following definition is provided to assist understanding.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental Health and Wellbeing is essentially about how people think and feel and the factors that influence this. The Health Education Authority, in 1997, suggests that "Mental Health is the emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and survive pain, discomfort and sadness. It is a positive sense of wellbeing and an underlying belief in our own and others' dignity and worth".

6.   Partnership

In keeping with other health and safety systems, the successful implementation of any policy document is dependent on many people working together to achieve the correct supportive environment. This partnership involves:

6.1 Managers

Managers at all levels within the organisation play an important role in the creation of the service strategy and, accordingly, managers are asked to:

a) Ensure that workplace health is a co-ordinated and integrated part of strategic planning and policy throughout their service;

b) Demonstrate active support for mental health issues and a commitment to actively assess sources of stress;

c) Ensure a service culture is developed where a mental health difficulty can be managed in confidence, and is not seen as a sign of weakness or

incompetence and where seeking help in managing negative stress is seen as a sign of strength and good practice;

d) Ensure that the health needs of staff are identified and priorities tackled, whilst taking into account the capacity of the organisation;

e) Ensure that appropriate training is made available to managers and employees at all appropriate levels.

In undertaking the above actions, it is recognised that managers are not expected to undertake a counselling role, unless trained to do so, but are critical in providing employees with access to support services.

6.2 Employees

Whilst the Council and its Services can provide a supportive environment for those employees that experience mental health difficulties, it can only be entirely successful if employees play an active role in creating a supportive culture. Accordingly, employees should co-operate by:

a) Openly talking, to their manager, or other manager in whom they have confidence, about any problems and possible solutions associated with their own mental health;

b) Supporting their colleagues with mental health difficulties;

c) Speaking to their G.P. if worried about health issues;

d) Seeking support or counselling from the Council's Counselling Service – Time to Talk;

e) Recognising that having mental health difficulties is not a weakness;

f) Being actively involved in the risk assessment process.

7. Information, Instruction & Training

To deal positively with mental health issues within the workplace, it is important that all those that are likely to be involved in identifying or supporting employees with mental health issues receive the correct level of information, instruction and training.

The risk assessment process should be used to identify the specific employees and the depth to which they should be trained, however, there are likely to be 3 levels of training identified.

a) General Awareness

This level of training is likely to be appropriate for all employees and managers. It will introduce the topic of mental health and provide information on where more detailed assistance can be located. Additionally, general health and wellbeing information will also be appropriate as a preventative measure for employees who may not be experiencing mental health problems. Online training and information leaflets are available to all employees of the Council. Information sessions can also be arranged through Service Healthy Working Lives co-ordinators.

b) Management Awareness

Management training is important, in order to support team members that either display signs of mental ill health or who have asked for help. At this level, the training should include more detail on the nature of mental ill health and the support mechanisms that can be used to assist an employee to effectively manage their condition. Management awareness courses are available through Talent and Organisational Development.

c) Specific Support

In certain situations, there may be a need to undertake more specific training for colleagues working with, or supervising employees with mental health difficulties. Advice on the appropriate type and content of training for employees can be obtained from the Health and Safety Unit.

It would also be prudent to conduct refresher training on the material available to all employees on a regular basis.

8. Further Guidance

A Guidance document has been created to support this arrangement and is available from Business, Organisational and People Solutions or on the Health and Safety pages of CONNECT.

<u>Impact Assessments</u>

Document Title: Health and Safety Policy - Arrangement Section 34 – Support for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Environmental Impact Assessment: This document has been assessed for significant environmental impact; no detrimental impact has been identified

Equality Impact Assessment: This document has been assessed for significant equality implications; no significant issues have been identified.

General Comments: This document is the arrangement section relating the general duty to manage mental health risks and support employees to seek mental wellness. This action is required in compliance with the Council's health and safety policy and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The general aims of the council are to ensure a healthy and safe working environment for all persons working for or make use of Council Services. Nothing in the document serves to have a negative impact on either of the above topics. In general, this and associated documents will encourage positive consideration of relevant factors to ensure all members of the workforce and community are afforded access to the same safe and healthy workplace.