

Essex Fire Authority

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MEETING

AGENDA ITEM

Policy & Strategy Committee

8

MEETING DATE

REPORT NUMBER

23 September 2015

EFA/078/15

SUBJECT

Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing

REPORT BY

Lindsey Stafford-Scott, Director of HR and Organisational Development

PRESENTED BY

Lindsay Shankland, Deputy Director of HR and Organisational Development

SUMMARY

Mental ill health is prevalent within society and the nature of Emergency Services means employees are additionally at risk of psychological illness or trauma.

In 2014-2015 the Workforce Transformation Programme initiated a project on Employee Health and Wellbeing. A major aspect which came out of this work was the need to look at the mental health needs of the workforce.

Through further project group meetings employees have developed a core statement and action plan to improve and safeguard mental health and wellbeing for all.

The Service is able to join the Mind Blue Light Programme for Emergency Services in order to give structure to this work and to open up networks and access to resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Committee are asked to:

1. Support the Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing core statement and action plan.
2. Recommend that Essex Fire Authority sign the Mind Blue Light Pledge for Emergency Services.

BACKGROUND

One in four people will experience mental ill health at some point of their lives. Over and above the stresses of day-to-day life, operational staff have experiences which place great psychological pressure upon them and may lead to clinical illness with a long lasting impact on them and the Service. To respond to this, Mind, the Mental Health charity, launched a Blue Light Scheme for Emergency Services in March 2015.

To date the Service has focused its attention on providing good support and counselling to employees experiencing stress or mental ill health. There are specific protocols to respond to critical incidents to ensure employees get the immediate and long term care they need to process their experiences. However, it has been recognised through the Employee Health and Wellbeing Group (part of the Workforce Transformation Project) that we can and should take a proactive approach and put in place prevention and protection strategies across the workforce.

A sub-group of the Employee Health and Wellbeing group has developed a core statement and action plan setting out the environment, policies and training which are required and identifying key steps to achieve this.

By submitting this action plan to Mind we can join the Blue Light Programme for Emergency Services. This will demonstrate that the Service is positive about mental health and are working with employees to build resilience and also provide support for when people need it. A key part of this will be to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness to encourage people to speak out early when they need help.

A key benefit of subscribing to the Mind Blue Light Programme is being part of a national network of similar services working to improve mental health and wellbeing. In addition there are training packages and marketing resources for the Service to use.

By implementing this action plan, working with partners and experts across the country and engaging with staff it is anticipated that employees will feel safe and supported at work and will have resilience to manage stress associated with work and organisational change.

The core statement and action plan are included as an attachment.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

All employees are at risk of stress and other forms of mental ill health. Whether or not it is work related, the Service is affected by absence or poor performance. Therefore a robust approach to managing mental wellbeing – including responding to critical incidents - will help people avoid illness or identify it early thus minimising the personal and organisational effects.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct costs associated with subscribing to the Blue Light Programme.

There will be costs to the Training Budget due to the provision of the Wellbeing and Resilience training package.

In the long term, the costs of sickness absence relating to mental ill health are expected to fall.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Service has a duty of care to its employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and is also required to assess the risks employees are exposed to under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

The Equalities Act 2010 outlaws discrimination on the grounds of disability which can only be upheld if managers are able to identify and correctly manage mental ill health.

USE OF RESOURCES

The action plan requires that the development of Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing is included in Service Business Plans which will ensure that it can be delivered within existing resources. The greatest progress will be made if many people make a small contribution each which should allow it to be absorbed within normal duties.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental implications from this report.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Direct and indirect discrimination on the ground of disability are unlawful and this action plan will assist the service in abiding by good practice and working within the law.

Moreover, stigma associated with mental ill health prevents some people identifying as unwell or seeking help early and the core statement and action plan will help break that down for the benefit of employees.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
List of appendices attached to this paper: Employee Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan	
List of background documents (not attached):	
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