

Committee: Overview & Scrutiny Commission

Date: 8 September 2021

Wards:

Subject: Mental Health and Wellbeing at London Borough of Merton

Lead officer: Caroline Holland

Lead member: Tobin Byers

Contact officer: Barbara Bachelor (presented by Liz Hammond)

Recommendations:

- A. To keep Mental Health and Wellbeing of staff at London Borough of Merton as a key priority as we move to a hybrid model.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Mental Health and Wellbeing offer to Merton staff. The Council is committed to ensuring that all staff have access to resources and training that supports their mental health and allows them to thrive in the workplace.

The provision of Mental Health and Wellbeing is managed within the HR OD & Strategy Team and through collaboration with the Remote Working Programme and for accredited Mental Health training with Public Health.

2 DETAILS

2.1 Background

The Staff Survey (December 2020) results showed declining Mental Health was the single highest deteriorating variant from 2018. The analysis showed the highest deteriorating response from 2018 to 2020 across the whole Council was Mental Health by 5%. It is not possible however, to tell whether this deteriorating response is caused by a work or home situation.

Sickness figures however show that absence due to mental health stayed consistent at 2 days

- (2018/19) 2.30 days - (pre pandemic)
- 2019/20) 2.03 days
- 2020/21) 2.05 days)

Overall sickness went down from:

- 9.52 (2018/19) - (pre-pandemic)
- 9.44 days (2019/20)
- 8.02 days (2020/21).

The mental health and wellbeing of the nation has achieved much media focus with claims that the nation faces a mental health crisis in the wake of COVID -19 pandemic with more people than ever needing Mental Health & Wellbeing support.

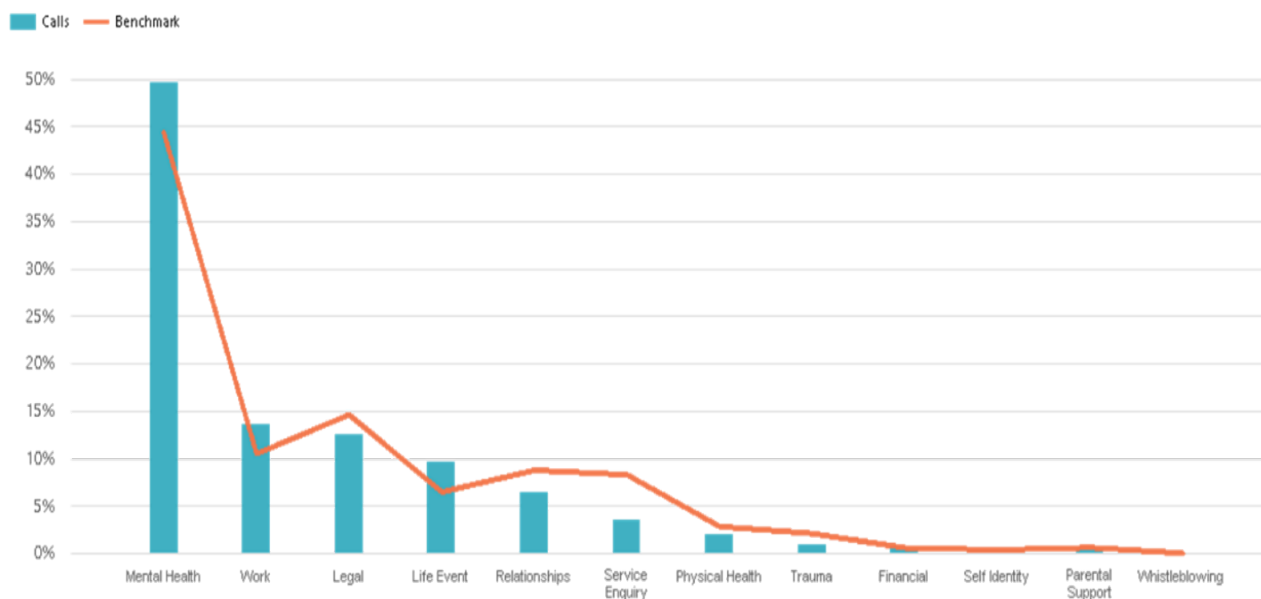
Research from The Centre for Medical Health (an independent UK charity, predicts that up to 10 million people will need support as a result of the COVID-19 Crisis and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) states that 19 million (37%) people in the UK are now suffering from high anxiety.

Our commissioned EAP provider has reported that the EAP helpline received 310 calls from Merton employees across the last 12 month period (01/07/2020 – 30/06/2021) with Anxiety being stated as the main reason for the call. This was consistent across their portfolio of clients (public and private sector) where year on year they have seen an increase of calls by 44% relating to anxiety and stress. This is supported by Merton’s EAP referrals of which Mental Health equated to 50%.

Table 1: EAP Data by Department & Reason (01/07/2020 – 30/06/2021)

	London Borough of Merton - Community and Housing	London Borough of Merton - Corporate Services	London Borough of Merton - CSF	London Borough of Merton - Environment and Regeneration	London Borough of Merton - Schools	Total
Mental Health	33	28	30	19	44	154
Work	5	11	8	3	15	42
Legal	10	5	2	2	20	39
Life Event	3	14	0	0	13	30
Relationships	0	7	1	1	11	20
Service Enquiry	2	1	1	1	6	11
Physical Health	1	4	0	0	1	6
Trauma	0	3	0	0	0	3
Financial	0	0	0	0	2	2
Self Identity	0	2	0	0	0	2
Parental Support	0	0	0	1	0	1
Whistleblowing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	54	75	42	27	112	310

Table 2: EAP Benchmarking Data by Month & Reason (01/07/2020 – 30/06/2021)



	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	May 2021	Jun 2021	Total	Split by %	Benchmark
Mental Health	10	12	18	24	24	8	5	8	2	9	29	5	154	50%	44%
Work	3	2	1	7	3	7	2	4	5	1	2	5	42	14%	11%
Legal	3	3	1	9	2	3	0	4	4	3	2	5	39	13%	15%
Life Event	0	3	1	7	2	2	3	0	7	3	0	2	30	10%	7%
Relationships	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	6	1	5	0	2	20	6%	9%
Service Enquiry	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	5	11	4%	8%
Physical Health	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	6	2%	3%
Trauma	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	1%	2%
Financial	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	1%	1%
Self Identity	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1%	0%
Parental Support	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0%	1%
Whistleblowing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Overall	17	21	22	49	36	21	12	22	21	26	36	27	310	100%	100%

The benchmark group are an average of all organisations (both private and public) that the EAP provider serves.

Table 3: Occupational Health referrals for Mental Health and Wellbeing

	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Total	Percentage of wellbeing referrals from total
Total wellbeing referral	11	11	11	11	10	8	12	15	14	10	9	12	134	37%
Total referral per month	30	30	30	30	20	29	28	42	24	30	34	34	361	
	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Total	Percentage of wellbeing referrals from total
Total wellbeing referral	14	12	8	9	13	5	7	15	16	15	8	14	136	29%
Total referral per month	46	44	35	41	34	30	33	54	36	36	30	43	462	
	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Total	Percentage of wellbeing referrals from total
Total wellbeing referral	3	12	2	9	3	8	9	5	15	8	9	9	92	29%
Total referral per month	23	22	17	33	24	23	19	24	40	34	29	25	313	

*Data for figures in red were not available (as this was with a previous Occupational Health provider), so an average of the referrals across the rest of the year of were used to make a comparison with the next two years.

Occupational data shows that occupational referrals decreased during the pandemic with monthly referrals dropping to just over 20 where previously this had been in the 30's and 40's as shown in the table. However, mental health referrals were at their highest in 2018 /19, making up 37% of the referrals made. The following year 2019/20 and 2020/21 there was a consistent reduction with mental health referrals making up 29% of all referrals.

Merton's data through sickness absence and Occupational Health referrals does not support the % drop indicated through the bi-annual staff survey and the national media hype that mental health is a significant issue. However, at Merton we have sought to pay great attention to the health and wellbeing of our staff due to the fact that lockdown and enforced confinement at home and working from home would naturally be taking a toll on how our staff are feeling.

3. MERTON'S RESPONSE

Two dedicated resources were appointed in April 2021 to support Mental Health and Wellbeing at Merton. This included one L&D Advisor and one Admin Assistant for a fixed time period of 1 year.

3.1 Training

To support employee's mental wellbeing, L&D have delivered 129 training courses to date this year with c.1300 delegates having attended training. 15 of these courses have not appeared previously and have been commissioned directly as a result of COVID-19 (See Appendix 1). Mental Health Awareness training was offered to Councillors and attended by 7.

3.2 Mental Health Policy

In the summer of 2020 CMT approved a Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy, Procedure and Guidance document which was fully consulted on with the Unions and DMT's before sign off.

3.3 Wellbeing initiatives

In addition to the formal training, Wellness Policy, Procedures and Guidance have been developed and publicised and delivered a series of less formal staff engagement programmes/initiatives designed to alleviate stress and support Mental Health. These have included though not limited to: -

- Healthy Workplace Market days with over 25 stalls/exhibitors and c.300 staff attendees of which 80% rated the event as "Excellent"
- Advice on managing Zoom fatigue (HUB)
- Support to the BAME Forum delivering a programme of anti-racism training across the council. During Race Equality Week delivered a daily programme of activity over the week.
- Mental Health England - Kindness Week (May 2020) in which a programme of activities was delivered every day of the week
- Wellbeing Wednesdays - lunchtimes sessions available to all staff delivered
- Singing from Home Mondays – uplifting singalongs throughout the summer, and supporting specific calendar events such as Kindness Week, Black History Month. A Christmas special has been planned for 22nd December.
- Financial Fridays – providing financial support across focused topics

3.4 Staff Surveys

3.4.1 Bi-Annual Staff Survey

HR undertook a qualitative analysis from the large bi-annual Staff Survey of Q13 "*Health and Work Life Balance*" which covered five areas

- Work-life balance

- Workload
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Merton cares about my health and wellbeing

The analysis showed the highest deteriorating response from 2018 to 2020 across the whole Council was Mental Health by 5%. In response to this L&D:

- Undertook a deep dive analysis of the five component elements by Team Level within each of the Departments.
- These granular findings have been shared with each of the Directors and their DMT's
- 12 departmental engagement workshops for staff and managers have taken place throughout July to really "get under the skin" of these quantitative responses. The main themes coming out of this engagement have been:
 - Relentless workload (stopping staff taking leave and engaging in training)
 - Manager support inconsistent – wellbeing should be as important as service delivery
 - Staff not taking breaks/lunch
 - Staff working what would have been their commute time

3.4.2 Pulse Surveys

Two pulse surveys have also been completed, one in May 2020 and one in May 2021.

Results from the May 2020 survey summary findings are below:

- **Stress:** of the 770 respondents, 32% said it was the same, 19% said it was better and 22% said it was much better. Although 19% said it was worse.
- Of the 746 respondents, 23% strongly agreed and 55% agreed that they ***can maintain good mental health while working from home.***
- **Support:** Overwhelmingly, many of the respondents felt they either had the help and support or did not require any more to manage their health and wellbeing while working from home. Those that do asked for more contact and support from managers, the right equipment, the need to take regular breaks and, by far the most significant, more informal, and social interaction with colleagues

May 2021 Smart Working pulse survey results from 781 responses:

- **Working from home preferences** - 92% want to work from home in some capacity going forward
- **Part time preferences** - 70% of those who want to work part time wish to work between 2-3 days in the office each week
- **Reasons for coming back in the office** – 69% social interaction with colleagues, 58% - printing/ photocopying and 30% meetings and calls
- **Ability to maintain good physical health** - 75% of staff agree that they can maintain good physical health
- **Ability to maintain good mental health** - 75% of staff agree that they can maintain good mental health.

An analysis of all the free fields within the survey were collated and the themed responses can be found in the table below.

Q7. Ideas to support health and wellbeing	Q9. Biggest challenges of remote working	Q 12. Suggestions for improving support whilst WFH
Appropriate ergonomic desk/ chair (140)	Social isolation/ missing team contact (124)	Providing desks and chairs to suit individual working space (45)
Taking regular breaks without the expectation of always being available. (39)	Training from peers day-to-day (66)	Regular support and supervision from managers (40)
Availability of desk equipment (risers, wireless keyboard, and mouse, monitor stands, footrest, docking stations for laptops, desk lamp, gel wrist pads) (34)	IT system issues (59)	Improve IT response time (38)

3.5 Mental Health First Aiders

Between November 2020 and March 2021 c.34 staff across the Council and Schools were trained to become fully accredited Mental Health First Aiders. Details of these staff are available [on the Hub](#). All MHFAers have been issued with a green lanyard so they are visible to staff when walking around the building.

In February 2021, CMT agreed to appoint an Executive Sponsor for Mental Health and to provide accredited Mental Health Awareness training to all Managers.

The Director of Children, Schools and Families was selected to be the Executive Sponsor and over 20 Assistant Directors/ HOS/ Managers have volunteered to become Mental Health First Aid Champions.

In July 2021, Mental Health Mondays were introduced, with a focus on a key wellbeing topic every first Monday of the month. Mental Health Mondays provide information, resources, support, and a virtual session on the specific topic. We also ask staff to wear the Mental Health Matters t-shirt which is available to staff. As part of Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2021, t-shirts were designed and worn by directors and staff around the civic centre, Merton sites including the libraries to reduce the stigma and start the conversation around mental health.

3.6 Available Resources for Staff

We have been promoting our support resources to staff via a variety of ways. A sample of resources available are included below:

- **Employee Assistance Programme** - a confidential employee benefit designed to help staff deal with personal and professional problems that could be affecting your home life or work life, health, and general wellbeing. The service provides a Free 24-Hour Confidential Helpline: 0800 030 5182
- **Able Futures** - can offer nine months advice and guidance from a mental health specialist to help staff learn coping mechanisms, build resilience, and access therapy to help them with their mental health at work. Call free from 8am-10.30pm, Monday – Friday 0800 3213137
- **Occupational Health** – concentrates on preventing work related illness, improving health and wellbeing and supporting people back to work after absence from illness.
- **Good thinking** – supports Londoners to look after their mental health and wellbeing by providing digital resources. Available 24/7 on any device and completely anonymous.
- **Flu Clinics** - historically, HR's OD & Strategy Team have managed an in-house flu clinic during October/November each year for all front-line staff. Due to COVID-19, the practicalities and risks of administering this in 2020 were deemed too high. However, to ensure sickness levels were minimised during the winter of 2020/21 and to ensure business continuity of essential services and schools, a CMT report was developed recommending that all staff (including schools, agencies, and bank) who were not eligible to be vaccinated under the NHS scheme would be able to claim up to £10 per person to receive the vaccine at a pharmacy of their choice. 200 staff (including schools) took up this offer.

3.7 Appraisals

Appraisals have been reviewed and now include an area to review how managers have been managing their teams. Merton's appraisal period runs from April to May and in 2020 during the crisis of the pandemic and lockdown the requirement to complete appraisals was relaxed in order to enable Managers and Staff to focus on the many requirements of the pandemic.

To compensate for this Managers were provided with a Remote Working Framework for their 1:1 conversation with staff, which when followed would direct the manager to focus on the wellbeing of staff as a main focus of the 1:1 conversation. We now need to readdress the balance and ensure regulars 121's and supporting staff are part of the expected management behaviours. Appraisals also need to be seen as a valuable tool in developing a culture where staff have clear objectives that their performance can be measured effectively by outcomes, as opposed to presentism. In July 2020, when we introduced the Remote Working framework, this also helped to ensure that objectives were set.

3.8 Induction

The corporate Induction Programme has been reviewed and developed to support managers bringing staff on-board in a COVID world. We now offer a new online experience allowing staff to become knowledgeable about Merton without visiting the offices or needing to meet staff face to face. New induction checklists for managers have been developed to help support new staff joining Merton to have a consistent approach with everything about induction all in one place on the Hub. We have also created a full suite of training on the learning zone.

Additionally, we have undertaken workshops with "pandemic new starters" to understand the challenges they have faced in joining Merton in a COVID-19 world. The results have been categorised into HR, IT and Managers actions and responsibilities identifying several further improvements that could be made e.g., Full Joining Instructions covering some of the basics that a new starter might need to know, Improved structure charts on the HUB clearly identifying who's who etc. L&D will therefore be working with IT and Managers across the business to deliver these initiatives.

4. UPDATE ON CURRENT PRIORITIES

4.1 Current Priorities

We are currently working on a number of areas to improve mental health and wellbeing, these include:

- All managers to be trained in Mental Health Awareness to understand the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues. A dedicated £32k budget has been identified to support this and support Wellbeing and Remote working training required by staff.
- Developing an updated wellbeing communication area on the Hub. New look pages will be easier to navigate and offer more resources.

- Offering a tailored L&D offer working with managers in specific areas of the council to support the training requirements of their teams.
- Training Wellbeing Champions across the directorates to support the embedding of Mental Health and Wellbeing across the organisation. The nominated Wellbeing champions are individuals who have influence, knowledge and confidence to advocate Mental Health awareness within the directorate and support positive wellbeing in the workplace.

4.2 **SMART Working**

In order to embed the new hybrid way of working we are working closely with the SMART Working programme to put in place FAQ's, quick guides and training to support the Smart Working offering as staff get ready to return to the offices on 6 September. Training / engagement is planned on the following subjects:

- Returning to the office – how to handle anxiety
- Leading Hybrid teams (for managers)
- Masterclasses: working in a hybrid model (for staff)
- Supporting the digital adoption delivering Teams / Outlook training
- Engagement sessions on the new Smart Working model

4.3 **Plans for the future**

From the pulse survey and engagement session feedback we plan to put in place a Wellbeing Commitment / Strategy with clear areas we intend to develop. We also plan to develop an action plan to address the issues arising from the deep dive / pulse survey analysis.

Gaining the London Healthy Workplace Award - Taking into account the work that has been delivered over the last year, we plan to start the application process to apply for Merton Council to receive foundation level accreditation of the Healthy Workplace Award.

5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

5.1 The alternative option would be to do nothing

5.2 Make wellbeing roles permanent as such a fundamental area of work

6. **CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

It is proposed that we continue to make improvements and understand needs by regular engagement with staff and CMT.

7. TIMETABLE

Accredited Mental Health Awareness for all managers (300) shall start in September 202.

8. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Wellbeing resource to carry on this work after March 2022 would be required as currently being carried out by fixed contract staff. The cost of resources would be L&D Advisor Circa £40k and Admin Assistant Circa £25k per year plus add on costs of 29%.
- 8.2 Delivery of current activities will be completed using existing resources.

9. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications arising from the report.

10. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The way we look after the mental health and wellbeing of our staff will reflect on the way we provide services to our communities in Merton.

11. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 None

12. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Without a key focus on wellbeing and mental health, the council would risk:

- Sick absence increase
- The cost of Occupational health and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to increase
- Reduction of output by workforce due to lack of motivation and unhappiness at work.
- High turnover, staff moving to organisations where wellbeing and mental health are a priority

13. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- APPENDIX 1 – Wellbeing Training plans 2018 – 2021

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

APPENDIX 1 – WELLBEING TRAINING PLANS 2018 -- 2021

Year	2018 - 19 *(F2F courses titled differently)		2019 - 20 *(F2F courses titled differently)		(2020 – 10/8/21)		Average Attendance
	Count of Courses	Sum of Delegates Booked	Count of Courses	Sum of Delegates Booked	Count of Courses	Sum of Delegates Booked	NB – Figures rounded up/down
Appraisal Training for Employees					8	83	10
Appraisal Training for Managers					7	79	11
Being a Manager in Merton	4	30	3	17	4	36	9
Bereavement - Webinar					1	12	12
Dignity in Care - Webinar					1	4	4
Building Personal Resilience and Beating Stress					3	26	9
End of Life - Webinar					1	15	15
First Aid at Work 3 Day	2	19	1	10	3	25	8
First Aid Refresher	3	13			3	22	7
Fostering Motivation and Resilience in Time of Change					1	5	5
Mental Health Awareness - Webinar					10	83	8
Mental Health First Aid - First Aider					5	34	5
Mindfulness - Webinar					2	38	19
Microsoft Teams					8	92	12
Microsoft Outlook					4	25	6
Microsoft Excel					1	10	10
Microsoft Word					1	4	4
Paediatric First Aid			1	11	7	58	8
Personal Safety & Lone Working - Webinar			4	51	1	5	11
SharePoint					2	14	7
Stress Management - Webinar	3	41	3	41	4	56	14
Suicide Awareness					5	18	4
Supporting People with Dementia Webinar					1	8	8
Supporting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of your Team					4	38	10
Talent Management			1	16	5	54	11
The Road to Resilience - Webinar	3	41	3	41	3	49	16
Virtual Able Futures					3	22	7
Virtual Able Futures - Managers					3	20	7
Virtual Autism Awareness	2	17	4	45	2	26	11

Virtual Equality, Dignity, Privacy & Diversity - Adult Social Care	1	12	3	27	2	22	10
Virtual Infection Control	3	40	4	42	3	25	11
Virtual Leading Remote Teams					3	41	14
Virtual Managing Diversity & Inclusion - Managers					3	23	8
Virtual Managing Performance and Difficult Conversations Remotely			2	29	4	46	12
Virtual Safeguarding - COVID-19-19					2	21	11
Virtual Working with Diversity & Inclusion	4	55			3	28	14
Virtual Working with Unconscious Bias					4	70	18
What is trauma? - Webinar					2	39	20
Zoom Training					2	25	13
Grand Total	25	268	29	330	129	1301	10

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