

A Sustainable Workplace & Healthy Workforce

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the initiatives developed to support the emotional and physical wellbeing of employees, particularly during the pandemic. It includes how different ways of working will help to sustain the organisation and drive it towards 2030, as well as helping to support our workforce in the process. It also provides an update on the progress the organisation is making in the return to the workplace, working to a new hybrid model and how the council can incorporate this to encourage green and active travel.
- 1.2 Item 4b (attached) is the BMBC Our People Strategy, which summaries the key themes and priorities of the strategy for 2022-2025.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all employees, promoting health and wellbeing, and supporting employees who experience health difficulties. In February 2020 a health and wellbeing survey was conducted across the council. The aim of the survey was to develop an understanding of the current health and wellbeing of BMBC employees. It was envisaged that this would inform the development of an Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy, ensure that activities and interventions are designed to meet employee needs and provide a baseline to measure their impact. This survey would also form part of the submission for the South Yorkshire Bewell@work Award.
- 2.2. The survey was designed and implemented by a working group of colleagues across BMBC, including Human Resources, Business Intelligence, Public Health, Organisational & Workforce Development, Communications, and the Wellbeing Stakeholder Group. The survey covered a range of health topics and incorporated validated questions from national survey tools where possible. It was piloted at the Public Health Forum in December 2019 and amended in response to additional feedback from the Wellbeing Stakeholder Group and the Organisational Development Board. The survey was promoted primarily for digital completion; however, a paper format was available for non-networked employees without access to a digital device. The survey was open for completion between February 10th and March 6th, 2020.
- 2.3 In March 2020 the organisation was faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to Covid-19 an initial pulse survey was undertaken in May 2020 with a further pulse survey in October 2020 to see what impact Covid-19 was having on the workforce. From each of the surveys the Wellbeing Stakeholder Group developed and later updated an action plan to address the needs of the organisation.
- 2.4 The Health and Wellbeing survey was completed in February/March 2020 by a total of 2114 employees which equates to a 66% response rate. The outcome of this survey highlighted:-

- In total, 58% of the survey respondents described their current mental health as Very Good/Good and 10.7% described their current mental health as Poor/Very Poor. Among those who reported Poor/Very Poor mental health, there were more women (70%) than men (30%) which mirrors the gender split within the council.
- Employees were asked to rate four areas of personal wellbeing using the Office of National Statistics (ONS) measures. Council-wide scores for life satisfaction, happiness and feeling that things you do in life are worthwhile were all slightly lower among BMBC employees than UK and Barnsley averages. Almost half of the workforce (46%) indicated a level of anxiety between 'Medium' and 'Very High'. This may account for the council average anxiety score being noticeably higher than the Barnsley and UK averages. More women than men reported having 'Very High' anxiety levels (9.9% versus 5.3%).
- In total, 10% of survey respondents stated they had missed a day off work through anxiety, depression or stress during 2019. This equates to 219 employees. There was no variation between men and women in the data. However, employees aged 21-30 had a slightly higher percentage as compared to the overall total (14.4%) and the 61-70 age-group the lowest (4.5%).
- When asked about what they would do if they were to suffer from poor mental health symptoms, 63% of respondents stated they would share this with someone outside of the workplace such as friends or family. A total of 25.3% would share this with their manager, and 1.8% would discuss it with Human Resources. In total, 34% of respondents stated they would say nothing and carry on as usual, and this was predominately women (66%).
- Of the 516 survey respondents who indicated they were managers, only 9 (1.7%) indicated that they are 'Not confident at all' in discussing or providing support for mental health with their employees. In total, 80.4% of managers reported they were either 'Quite Confident' or 'Very Confident' in discussing or providing support for mental health with their employees.
- There was relatively low awareness of the availability of activities and information to support health and wellbeing among employees; 16.4% reported that they were not aware of any at all. In total, 38.7% were aware of the Well@work website, 57.0% were aware of wellbeing courses on our internal learning platform POD, 36.0% were aware of mental health courses and 47.8% knew about counselling.
- Only 9.8% of respondents felt that there should not be any information or help to access employee health promoting activities. There was strong support for the provision of information and activities to address mental health and stress (71.3%).

2.5 The first pulse survey ran in May 2020 was completed by 2,290 employees which equates to a 71% response rate. The key findings of this survey were:-

- 55% of employees reported that they love/like working from home.
- 81% of employees working from home reported that they are very satisfied/satisfied with the support received.
- Employees are experiencing some benefits of homeworking, with 73% indicating that they are enjoying not having to commute.
- 79% of employees said they are very satisfied/satisfied with the information provided in the daily employee update and information provided on the intranet.
- 43% of employees reported that their caring responsibilities have increased in light of Covid-19 and it is clear from comments made by employees that a large proportion of employees are finding the balance of working from home and juggling childcare/caring responsibilities very challenging.
- 40% of employees reported an increase in anxiety levels.
- 19% of employees reported increased feelings of depression.
- Other wellbeing changes reported by employees include sleeping less (33%) and feeling lonely (25%).
- 21% of employees working on the frontline indicated that they feel unsafe/very unsafe. From the comments made by employees their main concerns were in relation to feeling unsafe

taking public transport to work, challenges around the application of social distancing measures including a lack of measures observed by the public or that these are difficult to maintain in role, a lack of communication from managers regarding wellbeing and having vulnerable family members at home and the risks of infecting family.

- 15% of those working on the front line indicated that they are dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the support received. These results compared less favourably to those of employees who are working from home at 6%.

2.6 The second pulse survey ran in October 2020 was completed by 2,054 employees which equates to a 65% response rate. The key findings of the second pulse survey were:-

- 71% of employees reported that they love/like working from home, this has increased since May. 80% of employees working from home reported that they are very satisfied/satisfied with the support received.
- 19% of employees are working in the community on the front line, 66% of those were very satisfied/satisfied with the support received.
- 62% of employees on the front line indicated that they feel very safe/quite safe.
- 24% indicated that they feel quite unsafe/very unsafe, the major change can be seen in the 10% increase in front line workers feeling very unsafe largely due to lack of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and customers and members of the public not social distancing.
- 11% of employees were working from a council building and 66% of those were very satisfied/satisfied with the support received.
- Overall wellbeing remained similar to that reported in May, with 78% of employees stating that they were in good/very good health.
- 27% of employees reported feeling more anxious, a reduction of 13% compared to the May survey.
- 17% of employees reported feeling more depressed compared to 19% in the May survey.
- 50% of employees saw an increase in caring responsibilities and 27% saw a reduction. Overall numbers of employees with caring responsibilities remained static.
- 40% of employees reported that their household income has increased and 51% reported that it has stayed the same, with 19% of employees being worried about their current financial situation.
- 58% of employees said their workload has increased, the main reasons were Covid-19 (36%) and employee shortages (33%).
- 35% of employees stated that their workload was always too much, with 9% of employees stating that they “never” discussed their workloads with their manager due to lack of time.
- 82% of employees said that they are most likely to read the latest information in the Keep Barnsley Moving Bulletin and 49% from organisational emails, 48% from the intranet.

3.0 Current Position

3.1 As a result of the surveys undertaken, the council have put various initiatives in place to address the findings and support employees which include:-

- Procurement of an **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** - all employees and their immediate family have access to the EAP for self-care support and information on a wide range of issues such as childcare support, domestic abuse, legal information, relationship advice, alcohol or drugs issues and financial information. This is a 24/7 helpline.
- There is also an **App** employees can download ('My Healthy Advantage'), which also has an online and video chat facility. All employees also received a leaflet in the post, promoting

the service with a handy push out card containing contact information for easy access. It also offers support for managers to deal with mental health/wellbeing issues of employees.

- **Mental Health Awareness Training** – delivered virtually by Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England on POD for all employees to recognise the signs and symptoms and how to deal with stress. A flowchart was also developed to help managers to have discussions and support their employees with mental health issues.
- **Mental Health First Aiders** – 48 employees have been trained to be Mental Health First Aiders across the Council, to support employees in the workplace. The list of contacts is promoted via the online Employee Hub, with further plans for promotion as employees return to the workplace.
- **Bulletin / Straight Talk** – regular employee wellbeing features have been included in the employee bulletin which have covered different wellbeing topics and specific interventions and signposted to support e.g. looking after your mental health, working from home reminders about taking breaks, undertaking Digital Screen Equipment (DSE) checks, keeping in touch with colleagues, childcare support, encouraging physical activity, H&S aspects of returning to the workplace and encouraging employees to take annual leave to rest and recuperate.
- **E-learning courses** available on the internal learning platform POD on mental health awareness, personal resilience, email stress, and Managing and Supporting Wellbeing in the workplace for managers are available for employees / managers to complete at a time and place convenient to them.
- **Well@work intranet site** – this has been developed in house and includes a host of wellbeing support including a section specifically on mental health.
- **Counselling** – support is already available through the Occupational Health (OH) Service for employees to self-refer for counselling. This provision has been extended to allow managers to refer employees to OH from day one of an absence if it is related to mental health.
- **One to one checklist** – a template for managers has been developed to adopt when carrying out 1-2-1 meetings with employees. This encourages discussions about wellbeing and workloads and includes various links, including to a Wellness Action Plans (WAP) template. Wellness Action Plans are an easy, practical way of helping employees to support their own mental health at work and help managers to support the mental health of their team members.
- **Remote working toolkit** – developed and made available to both managers and employees on POD. This provided advice and support to employees who were not used to working from home and assisted managers in how to effectively manage employees working remotely.
- **Smart Working Masterclasses** – these were provided online to both managers and employees. The masterclasses gave practical help, advice, tools and techniques to help employees stay well and work effectively from home.
- **Commitment to Culture Change** – developed a Commitment to Culture Change document which encourages employees to effectively manage their diaries to include free time, regular screen breaks, reminds them of digital etiquette, how to manage emails, and include some personal development time. This was promoted to encourage, where possible, employees to rest and recharge and consider how to work differently and encourage good working practice.
- **Keeping active** – promoted that being active is good for your physical and mental health. In conjunction with colleagues in Public Health a website was developed and made available which shows activities to get involved in around the Borough.
- **Going home / switching off checklist** - developed and implemented a going home checklist poster which is displayed in all council buildings and a switching off checklist was published as a screensaver for employees working from home, to remind them about the importance of switching off from work at the end of the day.
- **BMBC Sleep Toolkit** – developed by Public Health colleagues and available on the Well@work website and has been promoted to employees.

- **Free flu vaccinations** – every year the Public Health Team offer a free vaccination programme in the workplace for front line employees. Since Covid-19 all other employees have had the option to claim back the cost of getting a flu jab.
- **Employee Support forum** – set up a network to support employees who are struggling with personal issues that are affecting them at work, such as caring responsibilities and going through the menopause.
- **Menopause awareness raising and e-learning course** – held a virtual awareness session for all employees to encourage conversations to take place around the menopause. A short e-learning course was also developed which is available on the internal learning platform POD which provides an overview of what menopause is, symptoms, real life stories and how employees can support a colleague who may be going through the menopause at home or at work.

Employee Absence

- 3.2 BMBC sickness rate for 2020/21 was an average of 7.72 FTE days absence per employee. In the previous year (2019/20) this was 7.99 and 2018/19 was 8.54. A more recent focus on managing employee absence and facilitating an early return to work was helping to reduce the council's sickness rate year on year. However, it is predicted that this is likely to rise for 2021/22, primarily due to the pandemic. This is reflected nationally. The main reasons for absence year on year are mental health related absence such as anxiety, depression, stress. For 2020/21 and 2021/2022 this has been closely followed by infectious disease (Covid-19) and the third highest reason for absence is musculoskeletal issues.

Annual leave

- 3.3 Due to the strict lockdown rules at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were reports that employees were reluctant to take and book annual leave during the 2020/21 leave year. During 2020/21 and 2021/22 HR/Payroll produced reports for directorates on outstanding annual leave. Annual leave usage was also monitored via regular progress reports to SMT. Communications were also sent out via the employee bulletins reminding employees of the importance of taking a break from work and managers were requested to ensure they were discussing annual leave and time off with their employees regularly. It was agreed that employees could carry forward up to ten days' annual leave from 2020/21, due to workload prioritisations in support of resident services. This will revert to a maximum of five days for the leave year 2021/22, except in exceptional circumstances.

Bewell@work Award

- 3.4 The council submitted an application for the South Yorkshire 'Bewell@work' Workplace Health Award in 2021 and the council was awarded silver status. The award provides a framework for the organisation to work towards to build good practice in workplace health and wellbeing. The surveys that were previously undertaken and the initiatives that have been put in place subsequently were given consideration and discussions took place with focus groups to ensure these were embedded within the council. The assessment concluded that the council promotes a healthy workplace and has considerable benefits available to support our employees' health and wellbeing. The council is working towards achieving gold status in 2022/23.

Wellbeing Stakeholder Group

- 3.5 The Wellbeing Stakeholder group continues to meet bi-monthly to progress their workplan and regularly reports developments to the Organisation Development (OD) Board. A financial wellbeing task and finish group was set up to look at what support is available for employees who may be struggling with their finances as this can also have an impact on mental health. So far, a dedicated money matters page has been set up on the Well@work website to signpost

employees for support and an action plan has been developed to look at various initiatives such as a shared cost AVC (additional voluntary contribution), an employee benefits platform and a salary sacrifice scheme for debt consolidation / savings scheme.

Smart Working Programme

- 3.6 The Smart Working Programme is currently preparing to launch its next phase in April 2022 as the council moves to its new hybrid working model, 'Barnsley is our Office'. Change management support and guidance is being prepared to help employees transition through the next stage of the pandemic and employees have been provided with a new 'touch down' workspace on Level 1 of Westgate where they will be able to meet, collaborate and have the important face to face contact they require to interact and work effectively as part of a revitalised workplace experience.
- 3.7 The council's bases in the localities are also being reviewed by the Smart Working programme team and several stakeholder engagement sessions have been held. Key proposals for improvements in workplace environments are being developed and delivered as a result of this work during the coming months.

4.0 Future Plans & Challenges

- 4.1 The council are working towards achieving the gold status of the Bewell@work award. To achieve this, the council needs to develop a mental health policy, look at developing disability forums / groups within the council and have an active travel or green travel plan which encourages the reduction of the organisations carbon footprint. An active travel plan will be introduced in 2022/23, linking to the sustainability agenda and promoting the range of greener travel solutions to employees.
- 4.2 The council has developed a People Strategy for 2022-2025 (see item 4b) which prioritises the focus on employee health and wellbeing. This is a strategy for all staff. It has been designed to support employees to be the best they can be and to help make sure the council are in the best place possible to deliver on Barnsley's 2030 ambitions and the Council Plan priorities. It will also help ensure the organisation is modern, inclusive, efficient, and a high performing council.

The People Strategy has three key themes:

- Effective leadership, values and culture.
 - Maximising organisational capacity and capability.
 - Supporting colleagues to have a great employee experience.
- 4.3 The council continues to be assessed as part of the Investors in People (IiP) Award for which it has retained gold status. Health and wellbeing feature strongly in this assessment. The organisation regularly undertakes an employee survey which includes questions addressing employee health and wellbeing. A full health needs assessment of the council may be undertaken again in 2022/23.
- 4.4 The council is currently investigating the need for trauma support to be made available across the organisation and what this need might look like. A health needs assessment is being undertaken to determine what the organisational demand might be.
- 4.5 Covid-19 has been a big challenge for all services, but employees regularly demonstrate their resilience and the council has put in place effective support mechanisms and options for employees through this difficult time. These initiatives will remain in place to support employees going forward. The wellbeing stakeholder group, which includes the Smart Working Project

Manager, will continue to consider and address any future needs that may arise, including as a result of feedback from employees.

- 4.6 The Smart Working Programme will monitor and review the performance and impact of the new hybrid working model and workspaces throughout 2022/23 and ensure that the workstreams delivered within each theme continue to meet the requirements set out in our People, Asset and Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAPS).
- 4.7 Following the pandemic all organisations are having to adapt at speed and there is currently no established consensus for the best way to organise work and workplaces in a post-Covid-19 society. With that in mind, the next period will very much be one of testing what works and what doesn't and amending plans and proposals, accordingly, maintaining agility in delivering effective services for residents and the borough.
- 4.8 There is also the wider impact Covid-19 may have on other health and wellbeing issues that may affect employees long term, such as delays in cancer screening and the early diagnosis of various illnesses, the reported longer waiting lists for operations / treatment in the NHS and potential increase in domestic violence during this time. The council also needs to monitor and ensure the new hybrid model does not lead to an increase in musculoskeletal issues.
- 4.9 The council will consider reintroducing our Know Your Numbers Campaign where employees are encouraged to come forward to have their blood pressure, cholesterol, BMI and diabetes levels checked. This is run by the in-house occupational health team and helps to identify any hidden issues that could lead to heart disease, diabetes, or other chronic diseases.
- 4.10 As part of the council's Transport Strategy and the Barnsley 2030 plan, the organisation is also working towards Climate Zero45, reducing emissions and encouraging employees to use more sustainable modes of travel.
- 4.11 The transport team are currently considering greener travel plans, with associated targets and will be conducting a survey shortly which will help contribute towards this plan. The council wants to encourage employees to try for at least one day per week to be active travel.
- 4.12 To encourage active travel, currently there is a cycle to work scheme available to employees. Other schemes will also be considered, such as discounted bus passes, enhance the existing cycle to work scheme, have more cycles (electric bikes) available for employees and increase the amount of cycle storage available around council buildings.
- 4.13 There is also have a car lease scheme where the purchase of electric / hybrid vehicles will continue to be promoted. There are electric charging points available in the main car parks within the borough.
- 4.14 There are also a range of discounts in relation to health benefits in the Just4you benefits scheme which is available to all employees and includes discounted membership for local gyms and access to various Health Care plans.

5.0 Invited Witnesses

- 5.1 The following witnesses have been invited to today's meeting to answer questions from the committee:-
 - Phil Quinn, Head of Service HR & Organisation Development, Core Services, BMBC

- Janet Glover, HR Advisor - Employee Wellbeing, Core Services, BMBC
- Ben Potts, Project Manager (Workstyle), Core Services, BMBC
- Michael Potter, Service Director Business Improvement, HR & Communications, Core Services BMBC
- Shokat Lal, Executive Director Core Services, BMBC
- Cllr Alan Gardiner, Cabinet Spokesperson Core Services, BMBC

6.0 Possible Areas for Investigation

6.1 Members may want to ask questions around the following areas:-

- Which areas of performance are you most pleased with, what could be better?
- What areas are you most concerned about and why?
- How will you monitor and evaluate the Smart Working programme?
- What do you consider to be the key to managing change?
- How would you describe the culture of the organisation? How do you think employees would describe the culture of the organisation?
- In your opinion, are messages being delivered and implemented effectively and equitably across all teams within the organisation?
- Does the membership of the Wellbeing Stakeholder Group proportionately represent the demographics of the workforce as a whole?
- How have you responded to the council's average anxiety score being noticeably higher than the Barnsley and UK averages?
- How are you supporting employees with increased workloads to prevent burnout?
- When do you expect the mental health policy to be implemented and how will employees suffering from mental health related issues be involved in the formulation of the policy?
- How do you ensure that employees feel valued?
- How will you ensure that the organisational structure is effective and employees have the skills and abilities to support the council's ambitions for 2030?
- What does success look like, and how will you know whether you have achieved it?
- What evidence do you have to show that initiatives are having a positive impact upon employee wellbeing?
- What examples of best practice have been used to develop strategies, policies and initiatives?
- Are there sufficient resources to achieve the priorities set out in the People Strategy?
- What can members do to support employee wellbeing?

7.0 Background Papers and Useful Links

7.1 Item 4b (attached) BMBC People Strategy

8.0 Glossary

AVC	Additional Voluntary Contribution
DSE	Digital Screen Equipment
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
IIP	Investors in People
MHFA	Mental Health First Aid (England)
OH	Occupational Health
POD	Personal On-line Development Platform
SEAPS	Sustainable Energy Action Plans
WAP	Wellness Action Plans

9.0 Officer Contact

Jane Murphy, Scrutiny@barnsley.gov.uk
1st March 2022