

STRATEGIC DISCUSSION PAPER

June 2021

The value of an Employee Assistance Programme

The profile of mental health and wellbeing both inside and outside of work has never been higher. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) can be an essential support service designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems, that may also be adversely affecting an employee's performance at work.

North Herts District Council's current EAP provider is Workplace Wellness. This confidential service offers all Council employees, their immediate families and Councillors free access to expert guidance, invaluable information, and specialist support from qualified professionals any time, day or night, either over the telephone or online. Where appropriate, Workplace Wellness can also provide employees and Councillors with up to 6 sessions of counselling either face to face, or by video or phone call.

This advice service can help people prepare for, and successfully cope with, life's events and challenges and the things that cause individuals and families to become distracted, anxious, or feel out of control. Workplace Wellness can help when people feel they don't know where to turn or who to go to for the right information, their service includes:

- Consumer rights and legal information – benefits, housing problems, tax credits, disability, neighbour disputes
- Debt Management and Budgeting –creditors, financial health check
- Emotional Support – poor work/life balance, illness, crisis, anxiety, loss, self-confidence, workplace pressure
- Family Relationships - communication, marriage, co-habitation, coping with teenagers
- Health & Wellbeing - problems sleeping, fitness, weight management, alcohol, nutrition
- Work and Career issues – change, team dynamics, work overload, conflict

In the last 12 months North Hertfordshire District Council has seen 7.5% uptake of the EAP service, based on our headcount of approximately 400 (employees and councillors combined).

| Service Type | Apr 20 – Jun 20 | Jul 20 - Sep 20 | Oct 20 - Dec 20 | Jan 21 - Mar 21 |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Emotional Support | 3 | 9 | 2 | 4 |
| Legal & Information | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Management Support | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 8 | 12 | 4 | 6 |

Workplace Wellness have confirmed that the average utilisation for EAP is usually measured at 5.3% of a workforce so we are currently slightly above average.

The HR team are committed to ensuring staff are aware of the EAP service and we provide employees with details and the link to the website at relevant opportunities including;

- in correspondence to employees involved in disciplinaries, complaints and improving performance meetings;
- in all attendance management and long-term absence related letters.
- Regular articles in Insight promote the benefits of EAP
- Details of the service are outlined on the staff intranet
- New employees are made aware of the service at their HR Welcome meeting.
- Reminders about EAP during the 'check in' calls and emails made to all staff during 2020.
- More recently we have also added details of the EAP and link to the website on all HR staff email 'out of office' messages

The annual cost of EAP is £1,800 – approximately £4.50 per employee / councillor – and as a supportive employer it is an important benefit that we are able to offer. Whilst it is difficult to put the price on peace of mind or the value of the support that EAP can provide, if it helps to prevent a long-term absence, or supports our employees through a difficult time then it is a relatively low cost and worthwhile staff benefit.

It is difficult to use the level of take up as a way of evaluating how successful an EAP service is. Without knowing the context of the contact, a high level of take up could suggest that there are concerns and stressors in an employee's work, whereas lack of use could indicate there are less concerns, or there could be other reasons for low uptake. However, we have received feedback from a number of employees who have told us they found the EAP to be a huge benefit to them. See extracts from a couple of testimonials we have received:

"I have used the online resources that are available and have found them really useful – it is good to know that there is a wealth of information available in one place, without me having to trawl the Internet looking for it"

"I have used the Employee Assistance Programme in the last couple of months. I found the call centre staff and counsellors very supportive and professional. Due to lockdown all my counselling appointments were via telephone, but that did not impact on the valuable support I received."

It is important for HR to continue to promote our EAP, so staff are aware of the service and how to access it in times of need, creating a healthy, resilient culture. HR will continue to listen to feedback from employees and investigate any potential pitfalls to ensure we are being provided with the most effective service.