

Focus on Mental Health at North Herts Council

The Council has always been conscious of its responsibility to support the wellbeing of its employees. This is set out in Health and Safety Law as:

It is an employer's duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and other people who may be affected by their business. Employers must do whatever is practical to achieve this.

The Council has gone beyond this general requirement, we recognise that it is not just about our duty of care and the legal and moral obligations to our employees, it also reflects that the right support contributes to creating an effective and efficient organisation. Placing importance on employee wellbeing helps us to create greater loyalty with our staff, contributes to better recruitment and retention and supports staff engagement and productivity including supporting reduction in sickness absence. This focus on wellbeing is in keeping with our values, in particular *"we work together and support each other to deliver the best we can"*.

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and employers should approach it with the same level of care. It's better to prevent issues and people shouldn't wait until the verge of burnout to address mental health. We should provide support and take proactive steps to maintain mental wellbeing before problems arise.

The resources and support that the Council have available to support mental health include:

- **The GP Helpline** – This provides access to GP appointments 24/7 by phone or video call. This has been of particular benefit since the NHS surgeries have come under extreme pressure.
- **Employee Assistance Programme** - Our free employee assistance programme (EAP) provides employees with around the clock access to confidential, independent, professional information and emotional support and counselling sessions.
- **Wellbeing platform** – this includes various wellbeing support including advice on nutrition, fitness classes, wellbeing podcasts, and BeCalm which provides access to a library of information to support sleep, mindfulness, reducing anxiety through guided meditation.
- **Mental Health First Aiders** - we have trained Mental Health First Aiders in most front facing services, with staff able to contact any of the MHFA for confidential support and signposting to additional support where needed. We support our Mental Health First Aiders to ensure they stay mentally well with refresher training and a network group.
- **Support for staff returning to work** - staff returning to work after a period of absence are offered an appointment with Occupational Health to ensure a smooth transition back into the workplace – if an absence has been related to stress or other mental health issues, then a Wellness Action Plan is encouraged, where appropriate to fully support staff and managers.
- **Regular articles in our staff magazine** - we regularly remind staff of the support available, signposting to external resources and reminders of the importance of taking annual leave to support mental health.
- **Wellbeing modules available** Our learning management system hosts bitesize learning and other modules to support wellbeing in the workplace
- **Other training available to support mental wellbeing.**