



INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

FROM: Audit and Risk Manager
TO: Head of People and Communications
C.C.: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Finance
Portfolio Holder (Cllr Harrison)

SUBJECT: Staff Health and Wellbeing
DATE: 5 June 2023

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In accordance with the Audit Plan for 2023/24, an examination of the above subject area has recently been completed by Emma Walker, Internal Auditor, and this report presents the findings and conclusions for information and, where appropriate, action.
- 1.2 Wherever possible, findings have been discussed with the staff involved in the procedures examined and their views are incorporated, where appropriate, into the report. My thanks are extended to all concerned for the help and cooperation received during the audit.

2 Background

- 2.1 There is currently a Health & Wellbeing Strategy in place which sets out the approach and rationale in supporting workforce wellbeing. This reflects the priorities set out in the Council's People Strategy and the Warwickshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Health & Wellbeing Strategy is aligned to the South Warwickshire Plan Delivery Group which is the vehicle for the high-level priorities agreed by the Warwickshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 2.2 The Health & Wellbeing Strategy works in conjunction with the Council's overall People Strategy 2023-2027, which ensures that staff work in an inclusive, positive, and supportive culture. The strategy is underpinned and monitored through the People Strategy Workplan which takes each theme of the strategy and provides implementation targets from 2023 through to 2027.
- 2.3 The Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2027 focuses on five key pillars of integrated wellbeing, including mental health, work/life balance, self-development, communication and personal health and safety. To ensure that it remains relevant, the strategy is reviewed annually along with the Action Plan. Both the Health & Wellbeing Strategy and People Strategy Workplan were approved by Employment Committee on 14 March 2023.

3 Objectives of the Audit and Coverage of Risks

- 3.1 The management and financial controls in place have been assessed to provide assurance that the risks are being managed effectively. It should be noted that

the risks stated in the report do not represent audit findings in themselves, but rather express the potential for a particular risk to occur. The findings detailed in each section following the stated risk confirm whether the risk is being controlled appropriately or whether there have been issues identified that need to be addressed.

3.2 In terms of scope, the audit covered the following risks:

1. Staff insurance claims for health/wellbeing issues as a result of poor working conditions.
2. Lack of duty of care shown towards staff.
3. Reduction in staff morale leading to damage of the Council's reputation.
4. Lack of monitoring of agile-working policy leading to a poor service delivery level.
5. Inability to attract or retain staff if health and wellbeing benefits are not promoted.
6. Poor communication with staff leading to sense of disenfranchisement with the Council.
7. Lack of timely support provided to staff resulting in diminished health and wellbeing.
8. Extra workloads resulting in staff working excessive hours.
9. Diminished workforce due to absence leading to increased stress on residual staff.
10. Staff not taking frequent breaks.
11. Agile working resulting in staff feeling stressed and isolated.

3.3 A 'risk-based audit' approach has been adopted, whereby key risks have been identified during discussions between the Internal Auditor and key departmental staff. The People and Communications Risk Register has also been reviewed.

3.4 These risks, if realised, would be detrimental to the Council with regards to meeting the internal 'People' element of the Fit for the Future Strategy. The Council has a duty to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of its employees.

4 Findings

4.1 Recommendations from Previous Reports

4.1.1 The current position in respect of the recommendations from the audit reported in July 2019 was reviewed. The current position is as follows:

Recommendation	Management Response	Current Status
Consider how action plans are managed with the possibility of them being maintained as separate plans for internal (staff), media and external actions with the overall aim of	The Health and Wellbeing Action Plan is currently being refreshed. As part of the process the recommendation around how action plans are managed and maintained will be built into the new approach. The HOG lead	Health and Wellbeing is now covered under three separate strands of governance. The overall Health and Wellbeing Strategy (including Thrive) has now been separated from WDC's People

Recommendation	Management Response	Current Status
the separate plans being entered on to the HOG action plan.	officer will put in place a mechanism for ensuring that relevant and updated information is on the HOG action plan.	Strategy. The Health and Wellbeing function therefore covers these topics at both a strategic and operational level.
Management should be aware of the commitment required from HOG members and ensure they are given the time to be able to commit to the meetings and provide input as required.	As part of the refreshed approach to the HOG, the membership has been reviewed to ensure specific teams across the Council have been targeted to form a new HOG group.	The HOG is represented by officers across several Council Service Areas, including Finance, Housing, People & Communications and Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment. The Community Wellbeing Team Leader also sits on this group to ensure liaison between internal health and wellbeing and external community health and wellbeing. Attendance is always high at the HOG meetings as demonstrated through the minutes.
Management involvement with HOG could help to encourage named officers to update the plan.	As part of the HOG refreshed approach, a new system of version control on action plan updates is being introduced.	A new Health and Wellbeing Action Plan has been compiled for 2023. This is updated during HOG meetings which take place on a quarterly basis. All changes to the Health and Wellbeing Plan are sent to the Senior Leadership Team and the Transformation Steering Group as part of the governance process.

4.2 Financial Risks

4.2.1 Potential Risk: Staff insurance claims for health/wellbeing issues as a result of poor working conditions.

Any cost implications of successful insurance claims relating to poor working conditions fall under the remit of Corporate Health and Safety. The Insurance and Risk Officer advised that the employers liability insurance covers claims for injury or illness to staff caused by Council negligence, although there would need to be evidence of a legitimate medical condition in place for the claimant to be successful.

All staff receive Health & Wellbeing training. The mandatory induction courses for new starters includes Health & Wellbeing Resilience, although any member of staff can book onto these courses via I-Trent.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has accountability for reviewing the Health & Wellbeing strategy, as well as monitoring its effectiveness. Whilst governance of staff health and wellbeing remains the responsibility of SLT, it is the Health Officer Group (HOG) who operationally deliver the Health & Wellbeing Strategy. The HOG identifies and prioritises actions and activities that promote and increase the sense of wellbeing among employees; this is monitored through an annual action plan in which recommendations are provided to SLT.

4.3 **Legal and Regulatory Risks**

4.3.1 **Potential Risk: Lack of duty of care shown towards staff.**

All areas of health and wellbeing are covered on the Health & Wellbeing Intranet pages. Managers should have an awareness of the support networks available to their staff. Likewise, staff also have a responsibility to ask for support when needed. The HOG act as a communications channel through which managers can facilitate staff support.

Included on the Intranet is a page entitled 'Mental Health Guidance for Managers.' This provides comprehensive guidance to managers to ensure that they know how to appropriately support staff in cases of poor health. Line Managers are also obligated to attend training on 'Long Term Sickness and Ill Health Capability' as well as 'Mental Health Awareness for Managers'. During the Thrive Survey, 58% of staff who completed the survey confirmed that they had attended mental health awareness training; 25% of staff who completed the survey confirmed that they had made changes in relation to their mental health related to information from the organisation.

4.4 **Reputational Risks**

4.4.1 **Potential Risk: Reduction in staff morale leading to damage of the Council's reputation.**

There are many ways in which the Council demonstrates that it values and supports its staff. There are several benefits in place that aim to boost staff morale, including a 25% discount on mobile phone airtime with O2 and up to 30% discount on Microsoft Office 365 subscriptions. Professional subscriptions are also paid, and long service is recognised at 20, 30 and 40-year intervals. These services are offered by very few local authorities.

There are also reward schemes in place that aim to recognise the commitment of Council officers. During 2022, it was decided by both SLT and Councillors to award an 'applause box' package to all members of staff as recognition of their hard work and dedication during the pandemic. This included:

- A one-off payment of £500
- 2 days extra leave on 29 & 30 December 2022
- A day supporting a charity or community project
- £10 per team member to spend on a team activity
- A free health check with Occupational Health
- £250 to staff who referred a friend to WDC (providing the individual remained with the Council after their 6-month probation).

The free health check with Occupational Health was successful, with 73 members of staff engaging with this service to date. It should be noted that this was the first year in which this scheme was launched. Eleven members of staff have also logged a total of nine volunteering days to date. From the 1 August 2022, a 'refer a friend' scheme was launched; however, the figures for this cannot be determined until a new starter passes their six-month probation period.

It was announced that from 1 April 2023, staff were to receive an increase in remuneration. The Working for Warwick Award saw salaries increase by one increment, in addition to any annually negotiated pay awards or increments. A further increment increase has been approved for 2024; this decision was fully supported by both Councillors and Unison.

The 'Work Perks' scheme allows staff to access discount vouchers on high street brands, restaurants, and travel; 311 members of staff currently subscribe to this scheme. There is also a WDC football team supported by SLT with kit sponsorship.

4.4.2 **Potential Risk: Lack of monitoring of agile-working practices leading to a poor service delivery level.**

The new agile-working policy states that 'regular contact should take place between the manager and the employee to discuss workloads, outputs, outcomes and maintain structured discussion and feedback.' It is also the employee's responsibility to keep in regular contact with their line manager and ensure performance targets and outputs are met as agreed.

It is the line manager's responsibility to maintain contact with employees on a regular basis, set performance expectations, manage outcomes, and promptly raise any concerns with agile working arrangements with the employee. This policy was approved by Employment Committee on 14 March 2023 and went live on 13 April 2023. This also saw approval from Managers Forum who have since been asked to distribute these policies to staff.

96% of managers surveyed through Thrive confirmed that they engage in wellbeing conversations with their staff; however, 29% confirmed that they do not feel confident to support those staff that they directly manage with mental health and stress. The introduction of Mental Health Awareness training for managers aims to rectify this.

4.4.3 **Potential Risk: Inability to attract or retain staff if health and wellbeing benefits are not promoted.**

Employee health and wellbeing benefits are advertised to potential candidates through the Council's website and internally through the Intranet for existing staff. There are several benefits in place including BUPA healthcare and the Cycle to Work scheme. The Cycle to Work Scheme has a designated page on the Intranet outlining the benefits of the scheme. 267 members of staff were registered with BUPA Healthcare as of 31 March 2023; 585 claims were made against the scheme from 2 April 2022 to 24 April 2023.

The Health and Wellbeing budget is mainly based on BUPA subscriptions and therefore the budget is dependent on the number of staff that subscribe; this offer is extended to Councillors. The HR Support team receive reports as to which staff have used the scheme and on which services e.g., dental appointments, physiotherapy, chiropractor etc.

With the current sign-up of staff, approx. £15-16k of the £20-25k budget is spent on BUPA. Funds left over are put towards health and wellbeing initiatives, such as training or anything that may be beneficial to the staff. There are also two contracts in place with Washington House who provide the Occupational Health facility. The approved Occupational Health contract limit is £75,000. As expenditure has only amounted to £44,608.91, this contract is well within budget and not due to terminate until 31 August 2024. There has been no contract expenditure against the Health and Wellbeing Training contract; this is a joint contract with Stratford District Council. The approved limit remains at £8,000 and is not due to end until 31 January 2024.

As part of the SLA between the Council and Washington House, it is stipulated that service reviews should take place at six-month intervals. The Head of People and Communications advised that contact is frequent, with a review having taken place on 17 April 2023.

4.4.4 **Potential Risk: Poor communication with staff leading to sense of disenfranchisement with the Council.**

There are several forms of communication that allow staff to engage with ways of working. These include both virtual and online team meetings, 1:1s and communications from the Media Team and working groups, such as Manager's Forum, Staff Voice, and the Transformation Steering Group. The Chief Executive (CEX) also issues weekly updates to all staff which ensures that staff are kept informed of any changes to the establishment or working practices. The CEX also provides occasional staff talks, which in recent months have included updates on office relocation and the decision not to merge with Stratford District Council. All staff-related news is published on the Intranet; the Media Team also issue a five-item weekly round-up containing bullet-pointed information. This is issued in conjunction with the CEX update.

Staff are often consulted on their opinions with regards to how well the health and wellbeing functions are managed at work. The Head of People and Communications advised that there have been a number of recent staff surveys in which the topic of Health & Wellbeing has been covered. 164 out of 480 members of staff completed the Thrive Survey (34%). An infographic of these results is being compiled and sent to various groups for comments. 109 members of staff completed the Health and Wellbeing Survey (2022) regarding working patterns and working spaces.

4.5 **Health, Safety and Wellbeing Risks**

4.5.1 **Potential Risk: Lack of timely support provided to staff resulting in diminished health and wellbeing.**

The Council has shown continued commitment to invest in health and wellbeing by providing resources to create a positive work environment. One of these resources include Employee Support Officers. These individuals act as immediate points of contact for employees experiencing a particularly difficult issue. They offer an impartial and confidential listening point and can help reduce escalation of an issue or assist and encourage the employee to take the appropriate action.

Unison confirmed that there are currently 205 staff members registered with the Union. The Bereavement Technical Officer is also the Welfare, Equality and Disability Officer who deals with Health & Wellbeing from a Union perspective.

The HOG is made up of representatives across a number of Council Service Areas, including Finance, Housing, People & Communications and Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment. This Group periodically reports to the Transformation Steering Group and Employment Committee. The Group identifies and recognises the contributions made by the Council to the health and wellbeing agenda. They also collate initiatives onto an action plan with the goal of progressing the Health & Wellbeing Strategy. The Group meets quarterly but is also used as a medium in which informal ideas can be discussed on an ad-hoc basis.

Advisory – Consideration should be given to including an extra column in the HWB Action Plan, stating the ways in which each action has been achieved and how successfully this has been completed.

The HOG terms of reference include the purpose of the group, membership, and reporting lines. There is also a link to the action plan which contains a schedule of work and delivery dates.

Advisory – Consideration should be given to including information in the terms of reference relating to how often the group reviews its work, how often meetings occur, links to any important resources, common issues that are reported, outcomes of any implemented actions, high standards achieved etc.

The new Intranet has an easily accessible Health and Wellbeing page with a plethora of pages related to the various forms of staff support. This includes maintaining a work/life balance, looking after your mental health, and steps to quit smoking. There is a dedicated contact page of whom staff should speak to regarding health and wellbeing; this includes the 24-hour Employee Assistance BUPA Helpline. The BUPA contact information does, however, identify two separate telephone numbers on the Intranet.

Recommendation – Although both numbers allow access to the service, the BUPA phone number for Employee Assistance Support should be consistent across all HWB pages.

Several pages on the Intranet relate to physical wellbeing; there are also pages linked to the British Heart Foundation for tips on keeping healthy. Free workout sessions with Everyone Active were made available to employees during lockdown to support them in maintaining their physical wellbeing. Furthermore,

following a campaign to increase menopause awareness, menopause symptoms were included on the return-to-work sickness forms and discussed at Managers Forum (October 2022).

The Staff Voice Group aims to meet ahead of Transformation Steering Group either quarterly or bi-monthly. Staff Voice will discuss general wellbeing concerns and will then forward these concerns onto the HOG. Several members of the HOG also sit on Staff Voice meaning that overlapping issues are duly considered. Topics of discussion include ways of working, home-working environment, and staff morale. An infographic of ten ways for staff to look after their mental health is available on the Intranet as well as a designated page of useful links.

4.5.2 **Potential Risk: Extra workloads resulting in staff working excessive hours.**

As part of regular 1:1s, managers are frequently in touch with staff to ensure that hours worked are reasonable and workload is managed. It was recorded during the Thrive survey that 92% of staff take part in regular team meetings; 83% said Senior Managers are accessible for open communication and 88% felt that they meet regularly with their line managers. 93% said that they would feel happy to discuss health and wellbeing issues with their line manager and 88% of respondents confirmed that their line manager takes appropriate action with health and wellbeing concerns.

As per the new flexitime and recording policy, as well as the new agile-working policy, the determination of an employee's normal pattern of working is subject to the needs of the service and requires the agreement of the line manager. Employees are responsible for agreeing their working patterns with their manager and ensuring they remain accessible when working. This involves keeping Outlook calendars up to date and working in accordance with the needs of the role and the service. Employees must make sure that their flexi-time sheets are up-to-date and available to view at any time by their line manager.

Employees have a number of options to review their hours. This can be through compressed hours, part-time hours, or a temporary change. These will be agreed with the line manager considering the needs of the service and will be reviewed regularly to ensure that service requirements continue to be met. Employees whose role enables agile working may vary their start, finish, and break times, as long as they meet the agile working principles. Employees must agree these with their line managers ensuring consideration for colleagues and operational needs.

Advisory – Consideration should be given to requesting that staff keep their Outlook calendars up to date.

4.5.3 **Potential Risk: Diminished workforce due to absence leading to increased stress on residual staff.**

Managers have a duty of care for the health, safety and welfare of their staff and should work supportively in conjunction with HR and the Council's nominated Occupational Health provider to support staff with sickness absence.

Managers are also responsible for carrying out return-to-work discussions and other review meetings, promoting a positive working environment, motivating, and managing their team to maximise attendance.

An individual can be referred to Occupational Health at any time; findings from these meetings are shared with HR and the relevant line manager to encourage the individual back to work through a phased return programme.

Employees are responsible for their health and wellbeing and for minimising their own absence from work where possible. All managers are responsible for ensuring that they attend the relevant training. HR Business Partners are an integral part of the support to Service Areas and will work with managers and staff to facilitate a return to work, including provision of advice, support, and referrals to Occupational Health. They also provide appropriate training to support managers who are managing sickness absence issues and provide information updates to managers and staff on sickness issues, for example, to advise of changes in legislation and best practice.

4.5.4 **Potential Risk: Staff not taking frequent breaks.**

The organisation has consistently encouraged staff to take frequent breaks from the screen. There has, however, been more emphasis placed on this since the move to agile working. The HOG has compiled a list of 25 things to do during a work break.

4.6 **Other Risks**

4.6.1 **Potential Risk: Agile working resulting in staff feeling stressed and isolated.**

There is a page on the Intranet regarding how to get into a routine whilst agile working. The Council has the same legal obligations towards agile workers, including supporting their health and wellbeing. There was a monetary offering given to staff during the pandemic to ensure that they had an appropriate workstation i.e., chairs, desks etc. The employer's liability insurance also covers employees working at home as well as equipment provided by the Council.

5 **Summary and Conclusions**

5.1 Section 3.2 sets out the risks that were reviewed as part of this audit. The review highlighted a weakness against the following risk:

- Risk 7 – Although both numbers allow access to the Employee Assistance programme, the BUPA helpline number is inconsistently recorded.

5.2 Further 'issues' were also identified where advisory notes have been reported. In these instances, no formal recommendations are thought to be warranted, as there is no significant risk attached to the actions not being taken.

5.3 In overall terms, therefore, despite identifying a small number of risks, we are able to give a SUBSTANTIAL degree of assurance that the systems and controls

in place in respect of Staff Health and Wellbeing are appropriate and are working effectively to help mitigate and control the identified risks.

5.4 The assurance bands are shown below:

Level of Assurance	Definition
Substantial	There is a sound system of control in place and compliance with the key controls.
Moderate	Whilst the system of control is broadly satisfactory, some controls are weak or non-existent and there is non-compliance with several controls.
Limited	The system of control is generally weak and there is non-compliance with controls that do exist.

6 **Management Action**

6.1 The recommendation arising above is reproduced in the attached Action Plan (Appendix A) for management attention.

Richard Barr
Audit and Risk Manager

Action Plan

Internal Audit of Staff Health and Wellbeing – June 2023

Report Ref.	Risk Area	Recommendation	Rating*	Responsible Officer(s)	Management Response	Target Date
4.5.1	Health, Safety & Wellbeing Risk: Lack of timely support provided to staff resulting in diminished health and wellbeing.	Although both numbers allow access to the service, the BUPA phone number for Employee Assistance Support should be consistent across all HWB pages.	Low	Head of People & Communications	The number will be changed.	End of June 2023.

* The ratings refer to how the recommendation affects the overall risk and are defined as follows:

- High: Issue of significant importance requiring urgent attention.
 Medium: Issue of moderate importance requiring prompt attention.
 Low: Issue of minor importance requiring attention.