



Blackburn with Darwen Council Policy & Corporate Resources OCS report

This report focuses on:

- Sickness Absence
 - Comparisons with other authorities similar in composition to BWD on access to Health and Wellbeing services offered by the Council to improve attendance.
- Mental health
 - Employee Support
 - Champions work and Support
- Barriers to employee health & wellbeing

Our Vision:

“Providing a healthy workplace for all, where all our employees can flourish and are able to make healthier lifestyle choices.”

Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team

Blackburn with Darwen Borough

Council

September 2019

Blackburn with Darwen offer a variety of services to help employees who are struggling with ill health or to prevent ill health occurring. Employees are encouraged to access these services throughout their employment, starting from induction. Managers are also encouraged to inform employees of these services. The list of services includes:

- Occupational Health
- Access to wellbeing services – i.e. health checks, food calendars
- Employee assistance programme - The service is 24/7, easy to access, confidential and free of charge. Employees have unlimited access to information, counselling, support and guidance on a wide range of topics including: Work and career, Relationships and family, Money management and debt, Health and wellbeing
- Able Futures – provide employees with a confidential MH support service designed to meet their needs. It's also offers advice, practical support. This can include telephone, face to face for up to 9 months.
- Health and wellbeing activities – which includes Octobers health and wellbeing month, mindfulness and sporting events
- Annual Flu Vaccination programme
- Health & wellbeing strategy
- Flexible working – which can include flexi time, agile working and V time.
- Mental Health Champions
- Health & Wellbeing Champions
- Ability to buy additional days' annual leave
- Employee benefits i.e. financial fitness
- Training & Development opportunities
- Access to local agencies and charities

More services are being researched to be able to offer suite of support to our employees.

Trafford Council

- Physio service
- Counselling
- Occupational health
- Health and wellbeing activities – such as mindfulness, sports events
- Mental health first aiders
- Ability to buy additional days annual leave
- Flexi time
- Employee assistance programme - The service is 24/7, easy to access, confidential and free of charge. Employees have unlimited access to information, counselling, support and guidance on a wide range of topics including: Work and career, Relationships and family, Money management and debt, Health and wellbeing.

Bolton Council

- Stress Management Workshops
- DSE drop in sessions
- EAP (Workplace Wellness via HML)
- Posture & Back sessions via physio provider, Fast Track physiotherapy referral service, mindfulness sessions,
- wellbeing room available for staff to exercise / use for yoga/Pilates etc
- Flu vaccinations for front line staff.
- Once a strategy is in place we hope to build on the offer to staff.

Following research other authorities offer the following:



Tameside Council

No longer procure a specific health and wellbeing organisation to provide employees with initiatives and events. However, they are working more closely and jointly with Public Health and NHS colleagues in the community to be able to provide a more structured and targeted approach to sessions and events. They have recruited a HR/OD Business Partner who is the lead for health and wellbeing and is working in collaboration with the ICFT to link health and wellbeing campaigns.

In summary these are the initiatives and campaigns that have been offered to support the health and wellbeing agenda:

- Be well campaigns – get active, alcohol consumption, smoking cessation, weight management
- Mindful employer to be reviewed 2020
- Workplace Wellbeing Charter
- Occupational Health which includes baseline health check screening
- Active links with Healthy Minds, TOG Mind – linking in with local/national campaigns (time to talk, mental health awareness week)
- Fast track face to face counselling support via Beacon Counselling/ Access to IACS counselling service for Social Workers
- NHS health checks run by the local Be Well NHS team
- OD training package with short 2 hour sessions focussing on Emotional Intelligence (Chimp Paradox), Building good relationships, Resilience, Time Management, Coaching/Mentoring, Tackling not dodging.
- Implementation of a revised induction programme with support for health and wellbeing throughout and starts at the offer of employment stage.
- Further collaboration with the ICFT (integrated care foundation trust) on events
- Dedicated resource to support employee wellbeing
- Retirement courses
- Support for carers in the workplace
- Fast Track Physio service
- Occupational Health referral
- We are also starting to deliver Mental Health First Aid training with a view to training up 16 members of the workforce to be mental health first aiders.
- Reemploy Access to Work Mental Health Service and we have a dedicated Vocational Rehabilitation Consultant (VRC) that comes on site one a month for new sign ups to the service.
- Recently launched wellbeing sessions being delivered by Healthy Minds Matters, they are delivering 1 hour sessions to the workforce. The course overview is as follows
- Mental Health First Aid training with a view to training up 16 members of the workforce to be mental health first aiders.

New Improving Attendance Policy and Guidance was introduced 1st April 2018, changes were made to the old policy, removed the triggers as it was felt these were too rigid. The new policy has helped to engage with employees to achieve and maintain appropriate and acceptable standards of attendance at BwD. It is a supportive and consistent approach in managing employee absence along with balancing the needs of our employees with BwD requirement to provide service to the community. Early intervention has been key with this policy, it has helped to engage employees sooner, supporting an earlier return to work, progressing through the policy to ensure an appropriate strategy for both employee and BwD. **Work** continued throughout the year with providing advice and support to line managers to ensure that the Improving Attendance Policy was being followed. This included early intervention to both support the employee, manager and BwD on reducing sickness absence. Senior managers and line managers have been encouraged to support and promote good mental health.

Monthly departmental sickness reporting formats have evolved over the last 12 months, to ensure that managers have better understanding on sickness absence in their areas, trends that have been identified and also highlight key concerns regarding both employees whose absence is a cause for concern and where managers are not utilising the advice of HR or the Improving Attendance Policy.



In February 2019 Adults, Communities and Prevention & HR colleagues introduced sickness challenges where each month a team's sickness absences are reviewed in the session with a panel. It is envisaged that a broader approach to wellbeing, behavioural, cultural issues in sickness absence and developing a joint culture and approach will reduce sickness absence. The review includes lives sickness cases, areas of concerns, any anomalies or patterns of absence and if managers require support in managing these absences. These sessions have been used as a coaching opportunity. These sessions have helped to develop an action plan and strategy will be monitored at DMT. The sickness challenge is to be introduced to all departments to review the team's sickness absences. It is envisaged that a broader approach to wellbeing, behavioural, cultural issues in sickness absence and developing a joint culture and approach will reduce sickness absence.

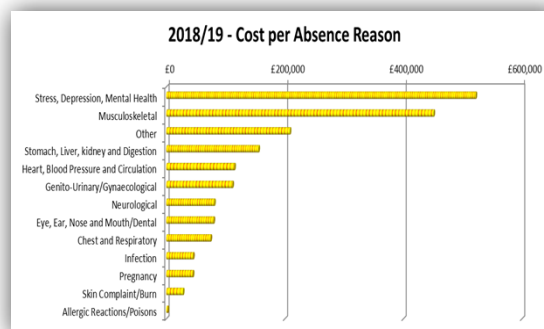
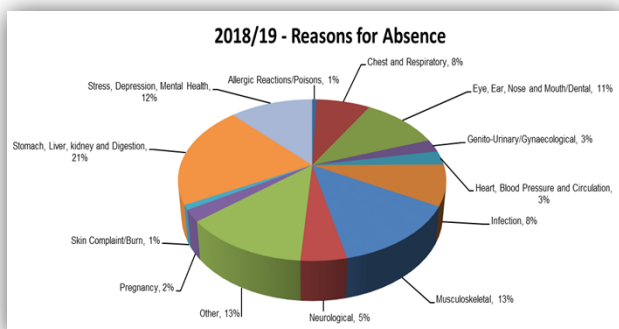
Some women go through the Menopause with little impact on their daily life. But others experience symptoms that can last for several years and have a negative impact on their performance and attendance at work. By increasing the awareness of the menopause as an overall subject area in BwD it would increase understanding and ensure the most appropriate support is available for those experiencing symptoms. Women over the age of 50 are the fastest growing segment a workforce, and most will go through the menopause transition during their working lives. It may be a natural process, but unfortunately, menopause remains a taboo subject in many workplaces. Some women will sail through the menopause but for others it can be debilitating and have a serious impact on their wellbeing and their ability to do their job. CIPD reports that six in ten women experience negative impact on their work. With the right support, there's no need for women to press pause on their career during this natural transition. But many women will continue to suffer in silence unless we break the taboo and start talking openly about the menopause at work. What are we going to do:

- Review existing policies & frameworks
- Help break through the silence
- Identify Reasonable adjustments
- Enable managers to support their employees
- Gain senior leadership buy in

Sickness Absence Comparison

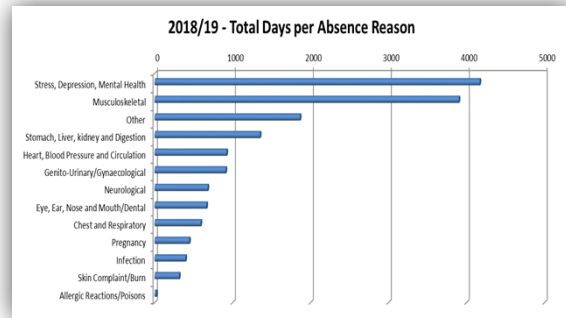
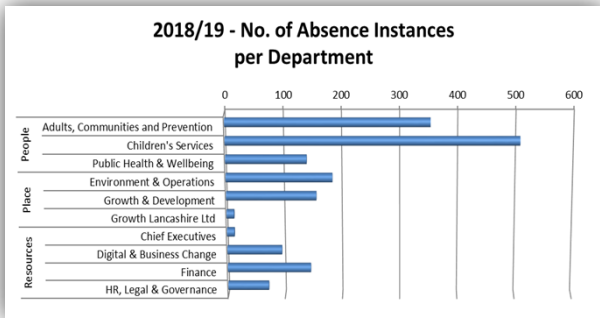
Working days lost due to sickness absence has reduced to 8.81 days per FTE. This is a positive reduction trend that has been reported for the past 3 years. On average, public sector employees had 8.4 days of absence over the last year. Heads of HR for Lancashire have reported their F.T.E results as below;

Burnley	5.69	West Lancs	9.87
Wyre	6.54	Ribble Valley	10.15
Hyndburn	7.36	Rosendale	10.62
Preston	8.79	LCC	11.96



The main reported reason for absence was stomach related 21%, 13% for MSK, 13% absence reason not reported and 12% with mental ill health. These figures are generally the same as previous years. Mental ill health is still an area of concern along with MSK related absences.

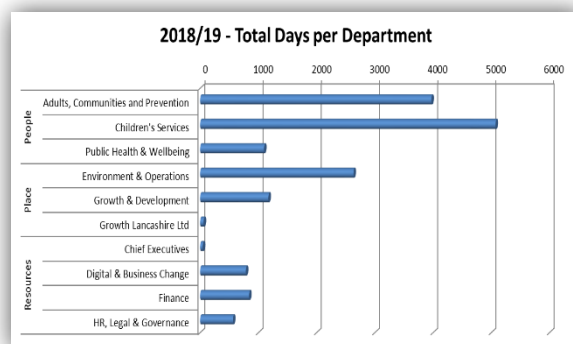
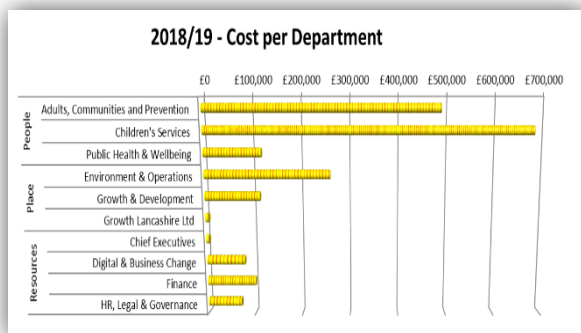




Overall estimated salary cost to BwD reduced by £181,982, taking the cost of reported absence to £1,921,698. With the estimated costs per FTE reducing to £118 from £123 in 2017/18.

The cost of absence and days lost per absence is where the reason changes somewhat with the costs of Mental Ill Health around £500,000, and days lost being 4837. This does not take into account the other costs that can be factored in to this absence reason such as intervention, on-going support, staffing costs and presentism. This figure could also be greatly under reported as we know that 1 in 4 people are struggling with mental ill health at any one time, there is still a stigma around speaking up and other absences maybe being used to mask mental ill health. Chest and respiratory reason for absence has reduced for the 2nd year.

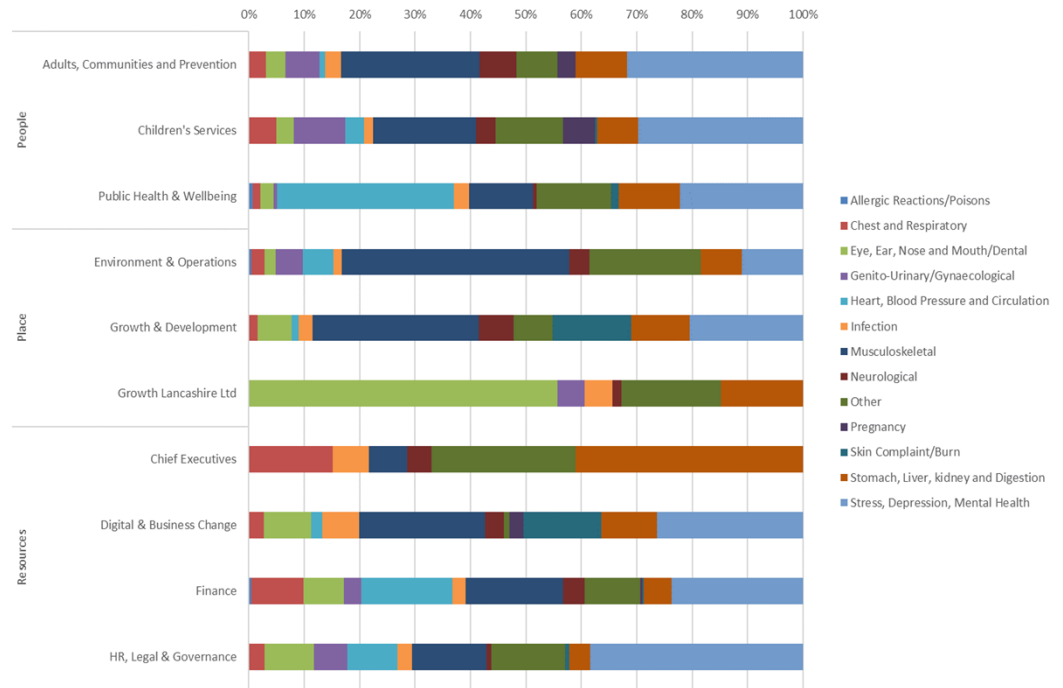
Reduction in costs and days lost in departments compared to previous years varied due to changes in structures. Some has seen reductions however have less FTE.



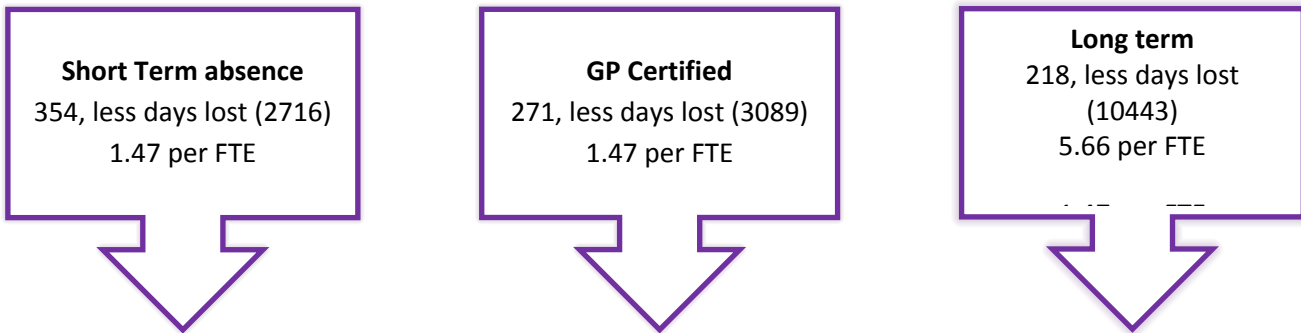
The graph across highlights reported reasons for absence per department;

Mental Ill Health features in 8 of 10 departments,

MSK featuring in 9 out of 10, not just in those roles that have physical/manual factors involved.



Length of absence

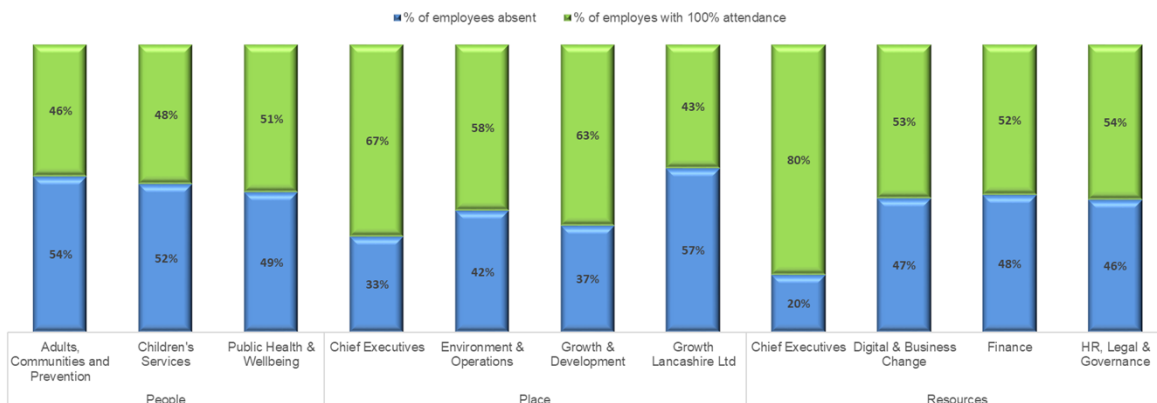


12 employees have left BwD following improving attendance management. 7 employees left following a settlement agreement, 2 were dismissed with ill health retirement and 3 were dismissed due to capability.

100% Attendance

1014 employees achieved 100% attendance in 2018/19 which is 55% of BwD workforce compared to 51% in 2017/18.

Place has the highest amount for employees with 100% attendance at 68.4%, with Children Services achieving 255 employees with 100% attendance.



Champions

Over 100 employees have undertaken the Mental Health First Aid training. Of those trained 30 employees have signed up to BwD Mental Health Champions campaign. In Duke Street, the MH Champions have created a health and Wellbeing notice board with resources and signposting so colleagues are aware of who the champions are and what support is on offer.

The MH champions have been supported with Lancashire MIND workshops, peer support groups and ongoing mentoring. The champions are passionate about helping people to understand that mental health belongs to everybody by getting everyone to talk about mental health. They give time and resources to undertake meaningful activities that help people to change the way they think and act about mental health. Willing to engage colleagues constructively and positively when taking action to tackle mental health stigma encouraging others to do so too. Keen to spread the word about Time to Change and what the campaign has to offer to organisations. Are empowering colleagues to share their experiences of mental health problems in the workplace and encourage them to become Champions too.



Time to Talk day took place on 7th February 2019, where everyone was encouraged to have a conversation about mental health. Colleagues and external organisations came together to offer wellbeing activity sessions to aid in the conversation. To aid in the conversation for both Manager & Employee 2 useful guides were developed, these were published on the [intranet](#)

BwD recruited 40 health and wellbeing champions across the departments/locations who successfully completed the Royal Society of Public Health Level 2 certificate, these champions are passionate, motivational and inspiring help support our Health and Wellbeing colleagues and campaigns. **Continue to promote**, recruit, support and develop Health and Wellbeing & Mental Health champions to encourage and continue the movement with the way in which we support our employees. 2 of the champions have developed 8-week wellbeing programmes for staff. Happy Mondays - Mindfulness & Meditation & Workout Wednesdays – Strengthen, Stretch and Relax Both programmes have started.



Continue to commit to changing attitudes towards mental health in the North West: collaborate with other Organisations to build inclusive workplace cultures. Reducing stigma, dispelling myths and improving employee wellbeing for good.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of colleagues' mental health and wellbeing
- Challenge the stigma and break cultural silences
- Create a community and resources that provide support
- Align to business-wide approach to mental health

Goals

- To inspire even more employers to prioritise the issue and take action to create mentally healthy workplaces
- To encourage people with experience of a mental health problem to share their stories



Employee Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2018 and beyond.....



Our Vision:
"Providing a healthy workplace for all, where all our employees can flourish and are able to make healthier lifestyle choices."



The Employee Health & Wellbeing Strategy was launched to confirm that employee health and wellbeing is a priority for the Council. It was developed to **Improve** employee awareness of the benefits of consistent healthy choices, **Enable** our workforce to 'do their bit' and take responsibility for their health and wellbeing to create a positive impact on health and attitudes across the borough to reduce the call upon limited resources, **Create** a workplace with no stigma associated with mental illness - Support employees with health conditions to access support and remain at work, **Develop** capable and great leaders able to support our strategy & **Improve** attendance.

Following the Time to Change pledge signing on 10th May 2018, BwD workforce have continued to be educated about mental health. Employees have been encouraged to talk about their mental health, supporting staff to stay well and in work and supporting people to return to work. Employees mental health and wellbeing is as important as their physical health and wellbeing. Latest research shows that as many as 1 in 6 employees experience common mental health issues including anxiety and depression, with work being cited as the biggest cause of stress. Evidence suggests that women are more likely to have a common mental health problem and almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety.

Following the success of the Mindfulness sessions earlier in the year, 2 further cohorts of training took place. This provided 32 employees with help to reduce stress and anxiety and conflict, and increase resilience and emotional intelligence, while improving communication in the workplace.

We have engaged with local business who have provided free of charge wellbeing activities. These have ranged from weekly Tai Chi sessions, Mindfulness workshops, Neuro-linguistic programming and Yoga. Other business have been in contact to offer their service, however due to costs of these services we have been unable to offer these to our employees.

The BwD Staff Rounder's Tournament was a big hit! - The tournament ended in a tie, and the joint winners were 'Healthy Hitters' from the Healthy Lifestyles Team and 'The Good, The Bat & The Ugly' from Leisure. The tournament raised close to £100 for the Mayor's Charity. The organisers have had some great feedback and are hoping to host this as an annual event.

Continue to work collaboratively with Public Health & Wellbeing and external Organisations to Identified ways to improve the workplace and offer a calendar of events for employee's examples of these will include:

- Stop smoking & Gulp Campaign (Give up loving Pop!)
- Resilience & Mindfulness
- Wellness Action planning & Men in Sheds

Continue talking about mental health, promoting positive mental health in the workplace by encouraging Informal chats around the workplace should be a normal part of workplace life, with managers regularly working around their team. This can help them check on how staff are doing and whether there are any issues that may be affecting the mental health of team members.

An enhanced offering of Mental Health support was launched. Able Futures will provide a wide range of first-class mental health support services delivered by qualified health care professionals. They will listen to individuals to understand any difficulties they are experiencing and create an individual plan of support. The service is confidential, fast and flexible and is available over the phone, through email and face-to-face meetings. There is no cost for this service and no waiting list. Once the employee has signed-up, they will receive a call within one working day. Employees will benefit from support with their mental health and well-being. Confidentiality is guaranteed.

We have encouraged trade unions and other employee representatives to play a vital part in promoting positive mental health in the workplace. They are often trained and/or experienced in mental health and can help an employer get messages across to staff. Representatives usually possess an awareness of the organisation and may be more willing to highlight areas of concern to management than staff. They might also know how similar issues have been successfully dealt with in other organisations. They can provide an additional source of support for staff experiencing mental ill health, including if the employee is not yet ready to talk to their manager. It can also be helpful to suggest an employee experiencing mental ill health can be accompanied by a rep



or a work companion at any meetings with their manager. This can reassure the employee and make them more willing to talk openly.

All employees to receive training in mental health awareness. Early intervention can minimise the effects of stress and poor mental health, so it is critical line managers are able to recognise signs that their staff are struggling. Despite this, it's been found that over half of managers are not receiving the training they need to support staff mental health. With heavy workloads and management styles found to be the top two causes of stress-related absence, some managers may also be afraid to have these conversations. HR can help managers to understand their legal obligations with regard to health and safety, while also equipping them with the softer skills required to have conversations in the right way.

No one is more equipped to know what is 'normal' for them than the individual. Providing resilience training, and helping staff help themselves, is a powerful tool in improving wellbeing. Having mental health first aiders on a peer-to-peer-level also means staff have somewhere to turn besides their manager.

Training would cover:

- The BwDs commitment to promoting positive mental health
- The law concerning equality and discrimination, and how it can be relevant to attitudes towards mental health in the workplace
- Standards of behaviour expected of all staff, and how unacceptable conduct will be dealt with
- What staff can do to improve and maintain positive mental health. For example, fun or productive out-of-work activities
- Spotting the signs that they or someone they know may be experiencing mental ill health
- Who they should go to if they need advice or support. For example, their manager and/or mental health champion. If there are trade unions in the workplace, they may also be able to offer further support and advice
- Any concerns or questions employees may have.

Develop a managers' guide to mental health at work and with agreement from management board, implementing mandatory mental health training for manager's. The role of a manager is to support their team members to be healthy and motivated so that they can perform at their best. However, without training, managers may not spot the signs that a team member is experiencing mental ill health. We know that if mental ill health is not treated, the pressures of it can cause other 'secondary symptoms'. For example, the strain of coping with depression may cause someone to become dependent on alcohol or drugs. Employees supported by their employer are more likely to be able to stay in work or return to work after a period of absence, reducing long-term absences. It's easier to see when someone is physically unwell than emotionally unwell, and for many people it can feel easier to talk with someone about physical health than about emotional wellbeing. Some of the first signs that indicate someone may be suffering from too much pressure or stress can be changes in behaviour or performance. Being aware of this personally and as a manager can be critical to taking a supportive, preventative approach.

This training would aid managers to become confident in dealing with mental ill health, it would include

- Becoming more emotionally intelligent and improve their self-awareness and social-awareness
- Spot the signs of mental ill health
- Understand the common types of mental ill health and the differences between them
- Understand the types of support and possible adjustments that may help a team member experiencing mental ill health
- Refer or signpost employees to local services or external support.

Develop awareness and understanding for managers whose employees are struggling with problematic gambling and related harms. This is in conjunction with Public Health and Wellbeing, who are currently in discussions with Organisations that can provide 1:1 counselling for BwD workforce.



Ensuring BwD physical and mental health services complement each other is essential in improving absenteeism, employee's health and wellbeing and service we provide to our customers. With depression four times as likely in people who experience persistent pain, it is crucial that we review how MSK and mental health support in the workplace, treating both conditions in a coordinated way to enable a healthy and productive workforce. Most adults will experience a musculoskeletal (MSK) condition at some point in their life, whether it's an injury, a bad back or a chronic condition such as arthritis. Probably the most common **mental health** symptom that affects **MSK health** is stress.



Challenges Faced

We have already done a lot in the past 2 years, more than other authorities and this has had a positive impact on the cost of sickness absence and preventing employee absences. However more can be done to help with the cost of absence and improving health and wellbeing. This of course does require a dedicated, additional resources and funding as there are cost implications to providing some support i.e. physio for MSK related illness and putting on more health and wellbeing activities as 95% of these are provided free of charge by volunteers & employees themselves. This also needs to be an ongoing programme to ensure continuous improvement, as the health and wellbeing of our employees should be a priority, as the employees are the Councils biggest assets. Studies have shown that employers who offer employee health and wellbeing programmes build and sustain high employee morale; drive effective recruitment and retention; improve productivity; and. reduce the damaging trend of presentism

