

CYNGOR GWYNEDD - Report to Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet

Title of item:	Wellbeing Strategy / Plan
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Llio E. Owen
Relevant Officer:	Catrin Love
Date of meeting:	17 th December 2024

1. Decision sought:

Cabinet approval of the staff Wellbeing Plan to support staff wellbeing over the coming years.

2. The reason why the Cabinet must make the decision:

It is important that Cabinet Members are aware and satisfied with the content of this Plan, which is a key strategy in supporting staff wellbeing for the next few years.

The Plan is presented to Cabinet for formal acceptance after a lengthy consultation process. Those consultations have included the Corporate Management Team, the Corporate Health and Safety Panel and Forum, Departmental Health and Safety Forums, Assistant Head of Department Forum and the Manager Network (Rhwydwaith Rheolwyr). The document has also been scrutinised at the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in October.

3. Introduction and Rationale

It's imperative that the Council has a clear framework to be supporting the well-being of staff.

Protecting the well-being of its staff is a moral responsibility of any employer. Failure to do so also presents financial and legal risks to the Council.

The benefits of incorporating well-being into all aspects of the Council's culture include:

- Attracting new employees
- Retaining our current employees
- Lowering sick leave rates
- Improve the performance and development of our staff.

As such, this Plan ties into several other priority projects in the Council's Plan, such as Workforce Planning.

3.1 Background / Introduction

The Wellbeing Plan presented today is a document outlining the Council's priorities for the well-being of staff over the next few years. The Council has had a detailed program of work on maintaining and supporting staff wellbeing for many years, which in turn has led to recognition through Corporate Health Standard accreditation by the Welsh Government where the Gold award has been awarded on a number of consecutive occasions. Unfortunately, that accreditation scheme has now come to an end.

Since lockdown, however, it is universally recognised that the challenge in terms of staff well-being, and the mental well-being of the general population has increased dramatically. Recent figures from the 'MIND' organisation highlight that a third of the working age population believe their mental health has deteriorated significantly since March 2020. This is reflected in the numbers of staff who have been making use of support available through the Council, where there has been a significant increase in Counselling Service use etc. We also know of course that the Council's sick leave figures are an increasing challenge with the true cost in 23/24 calculated to be £5.7 million.

In reflecting on the extraordinary period that has taken place since March 2020, it is also fair to say that there has been a shift in mindset within the field as a whole about the effectiveness of some past wellbeing strategies, and a recognition that no wellbeing strategy is going to reach its full potential when it exists isolated within an organisation, without being intertwined with other core culture priorities plans, and leadership. To this end, a 'Healthy and Satisfied Workforce' is now one of the work streams in the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan which is a priority in the Council's plan 2023-28, and this strategy is an important piece of that work. This sets a robust infrastructure for staff well-being issues to be at the core of the council's culture as a whole, and the way we develop our Leadership and Management into the future. Immediately, by having developed closer links to wider work on council culture, an entire section on wellbeing was incorporated into this year's Workforce 'Llais Staff' Questionnaire on staff wellbeing, the results of which have been fed into this Strategy.

Legislatively, there is a statutory duty to be supporting and greeting the well-being of staff. Employment Acts, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act, and the Equality Act impose stringent requirements, and indeed, the duty to be protecting the mental health of staff is one that is increasingly being addressed by the Health and Safety Executive. The Well-being of Future Generations Act also sets requirements for the development of sustainable programmes that greet well-being, economic, social, environmental and cultural.

Through the above, it will therefore be seen that steps have already been taken to provide the foundations to this strategy, and that it is time for a new strategy that greets the demands of the post-pandemic era, and the specific challenges it brings. The risks of not having a strategy are triple-fold. They are moral ones of contributing to the decline of staff well-being, financial ones from the absence figures and the risks of compensation claims against the Council, and legal ones of being unable to meet the minimum of what should be doing to protect workers. A healthy workforce is at the heart of everything the Council is committed to in terms of serving the Public, and it is a factor that weaves into so many other priority

workforce work streams, such as attracting and retaining staff, and the staff appraisal process, to get them to thrive at work and be able to give the public the best possible service.

The draft Strategy is based on good practice and the latest research in the field nationally and internationally, and presents three foundations for well-being that are based on work by the Investors in People organisation. The success of the strategy is dependent on collaboration at a Council-wide level and at all levels of the Institute, so that the principles permeate the organisation and reach all staff on the front line.

The corporate co-ordination on this area takes place within the Safety and Wellbeing Health Service. Expenditure and the need for a resource is monitored and assessed as part of running that Service, and in the past bids for more money have been made, and approved. In recent years, this has included a one-time bid for funding to be targeting mental well-being within the workforce, and another bid for a permanent budget increase for Medra Counselling. Again, this was approved. We will closely monitor the increase in referrals to the Occupational Health Unit following the launch of a new absence policy and system to ensure the resource is adequate to cope. It should be noted that attracting and retaining staff in the Council's Occupational Health Team is historically challenging.

3.2 The rationale and justification for recommending the decision

The Plan has generally been welcomed during the consultative process, with any relevant comments incorporated, and it is very timely to ask for Cabinet approval before the end of the year in order to press ahead with detailed work plans in the new year.

An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and the main issue arising is the need to ensure equal access for all staff to information about wellbeing support whether they have a digital account, or not.

3.3 Next steps

A detailed programme of work will be implemented based on the three well-being foundations within the Strategy, and consultees have been clear during the consultations about what the priorities should be.

4. Views of the statutory officers

4.1 Chief Finance Officer

In addition to our ethical and legal duties, there are positive financial obligations in doing the best that we can to support well-being. The report highlights the substantial financial costs of sickness absence, and whilst we will never completely eliminate sickness absence, I fully support the efforts to do as much as possible to protect the well-being of the Council's staff."

4.2 Monitoring Officer

It is noted in the report that several objectives can be achieved with the adoption and implementation of a Staff Wellbeing Strategy. It represents an important positive commitment to the well-being of Council employees. But, it is also an important vehicle to ensure that the Council fulfils its duty of care towards its staff. I welcome the Strategy and confirm the propriety of the decision sought

List of Appendices:

List of Background Documents: