

MEETING	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
DATE	17/10/24
TITLE	Draft Wellbeing Strategy
REASON FOR SCRUTINY	Scrutiny of staff well-being support
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1. Why it needs scrutiny?

- 1.1. This item has been identified at the annual scrutiny workshop as an item that it is thought would be timely to bring before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee in October 2024.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

- 2.1. This area has been recognised for scrutiny as the importance of staff wellbeing came to the fore following the covid-19 pandemic, and the after-effect of these extraordinary times is still very much alive amongst our workforce. The costs of staff absences due to illness are also a significant challenge associated with this area, and therefore it was felt that it would be timely to scrutinise the field to be reassured that appropriate arrangements are in place and that the proposed Strategy will greet these challenges

3. Summary and key Issues

- 3.1. It is paramount that the Council has a clear framework to be supporting the well-being of staff.
- 3.2. Deficiencies in our arrangements to protect the well-being of staff would raise financial and legal risks to the Council, as well as a moral failure to protect them from harm.
- 3.3. This wellbeing Strategy is woven into the core of wider priority workstreams in the Council's Plan, through the work on the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan, and in particular, the 'Healthy and Satisfied Workforce' workstream within that Plan.
- 3.4. The benefits of incorporating well-being from 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.

4. Background / Context

- 4.1. The draft Wellbeing Strategy 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 programme 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 nationally now come to an end, but more local schemes have also been adopted, such as the Corporate Services Department holding the Gold Award in terms of staff wellbeing support from Investors in People.
- 4.2. Since lockdown, however, it is recognised that the challenge of sustaining staff well-being, and the mental well-being of a general population has increased dramatically. Recent figures from the MIND' highlight that a third of the working age population believe their mental health has deteriorated significantly since March 2000. This is reflected in the Council 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 Services 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.
- 4.3. Reflecting on the extraordinary times that have taken place since March 2000, it is also fair to say that there has been a shift in mindset within the field as a whole about the effectiveness of certain well-being strategies. There is also a recognition that no well-being strategy will reach its full potential when it exists isolated within an organisation, without being intertwined into other culture and leadership priority plans. To this end, a 'Healthy and Satisfied Workforce' is now one of nine work streams in the Ffordd Gwynedd Plan that is a priority in the Council's Plan 2023-28, and this Wellbeing 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, a whole section was incorporated into this year's Llais Staff Questionnaire on staff wellbeing, and the results have been fed into this Strategy.
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. Through the above, it will therefore be seen that steps have already been taken to build the foundations, and that it is time for a new strategy that greets the demands of the post-pandemic era, and the specific challenges that will bring. The risks of not having a strategy are triple-fold. They are moral ones of being contributing to the decline of staff well-being, financial ones from the staff sickness absence figures continuing to rise along with the risks of compensation claims against the Council, and also legal ones of being unable to meet the minimum of what we 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 work streams as regards the Council's workforce, such as attracting and retaining staff, and the staff continuous appraisal process, in order to allow them to thrive at work, and give the public the best possible Service.

- 4.6. The Strategy is based on good practice and the latest research in the field nationally and internationally, and presents three foundations based on work by Investors in People. You will see at the end of the document a detailed programme for the year ahead. While many elements of that work are centrally coordinated by the Health Safety and Wellbeing Service, the success of the strategy is dependent on collaboration at Council-wide level and at all levels, so that the principles permeate the organisation and reach all staff on the front line.
- 4.7. The corporate co-ordination on this area takes place within the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service. Expenditure and the adequacy of 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 any increase in referrals to the Occupational Health Unit following the launch of a new sickness absence policy and system, to ensure the resource is adequate to cope. It should be noted that attracting and retaining staff is historically challenging within the Council's Occupational Health Team.
- 4.8. The success of the Strategy will be measured by monitoring data, such as absence figures, support services' referral figures, and quantitative and qualitative data from the staff voice questionnaire. In addition, data will be collected from the success of any particular interventions.

5. Consultation

- 5.1. *Prior to final adoption this document shall be incorporated upon it in the following forums as well as this committee:*
 - *Corporate Management Team*
 - *Safety and Well-being health forum*
 - *Safety and Wellbeing Health Panel (made up of Elected Members and Trade Unions)*
 - *Council Staff – Staff Voice Survey results are the foundation for inclusion*
- 5.2. It will in due course be submitted to Cabinet for final approval.

6. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1. As this is an internal document only for the purpose of staff well-being, there has been no direct public consultation on its contents, but it should be noted that the Council's workforce are also Gwynedd people and users of Council Services, and have had full input through the staff voice questionnaire, and safety forums.
- 6.2. The Strategy is based on the principle of collaboration across the Council and more widely. External organisations such as the Health Board, Public Health Wales and

the specialist supportive Services we commission, which are also local businesses, play a key role in the success of the strategy. As an example we have contacted Besti Cadwaladr University Health Board to get feedback on its future wellbeing programme, and are currently awaiting a response to the request.

- 6.3. Work is taking place to improve data quality and availability in the well-being field as a whole. This includes absence data, referral data to services such as Medra Counselling, accident data within the Council etc and this will be a great help in terms of the strategy drive and being able to target intervention going forward. In addition, the Staff Voice Questionnaire from this year will move to become an annual exercise which will provide more consistent monitoring of staff opinion.
- 6.4. Workforce demography is certainly a factor to consider and yet better data will allow us to better target interventions. As an example at the moment, there is a current intention to establish a young staff hub as an opportunity for young staff to come together to network. Accurate and timely data for the future will enable us to respond much more quickly to evolving challenges, along with keeping ahead of national developments in this field.

7. Impact on Equality Characteristics, Welsh and Socio-Economic Duty

- 7.1. Equality issues are an important part of the strategy with an intention during the year to raise awareness of important topics such as neuro-diversity, menopause and alcohol and drug addiction.
- 7.2. One of the main challenges of the communication plan for the Strategy is to ensure that we reach all employees, in all workplaces, including the workforce who do not currently have a digital account.
- 7.3. Language issues are an issue that is continually addressed in our programme of work. The support available to staff is bi-lingual in line with the Health Services' 'More than Words' principle of accessing a Health service through Welsh. Only one element is currently an exception, the Occupational Health Consultant, but work is currently taking place with a local doctor to try and identify a successor who is a Welsh speaker. Otherwise, we pride ourselves on being able to provide a highly specialised Service entirely through the medium of Welsh.

8. Next Steps

See point 5.1. above

Appendices

Council Staff Well-being Plan 2024 – 2028

Cyngor Gwynedd Well-being Programme May 2024 - March 2025