

Cabinet

17 April 2024

Durham County Council becoming signatories to the MIND Mental Health at Work Commitment

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Jane Robinson, Corporate Director of Adult & Health Services

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Amanda Healy, Director of Public Health, Durham County Council

Councillor Hood, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult & Health Services

Councillor Bell, Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Cabinet with an overview of the ongoing good work to improve mental health and wellbeing.
- 2 To provide Cabinet with an overview of the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment.
- 3 To propose that Durham County Council becomes a signatory to the Commitment.

Executive summary

- 4 Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing is one of the four key priorities of the County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28. Work is a key influence on health, and being in good work has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.
- 5 Previously Durham County Council was a signatory of the Time to Change Employer Pledge, which was a commitment by organisations to change the way we all think and act about mental health in the

workplace. The pledge was underpinned by a 12-month Employer Action plan that was founded upon the principles of the Thriving at Work Report (2017)¹. It attracted signatories from a range of County Durham organisations and became a locally recognised approach to improving workplace mental health and wellbeing. It was also complemented by annual 'Time to Talk' campaigns that brought people together to normalise mental health conversations.

- 6 Time to Change (the charity) closed in March 2021; however, signatory organisations were allowed to continue to use the pledge. Mind has committed to carry on the pledge work through the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment, which is based on the following 'Thriving at Work' core standards:
 - produce, implement, and communicate a mental health at work plan;
 - develop mental health awareness among employees;
 - encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling;
 - provide your employees with good working conditions;
 - promote effective people management;
 - routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.
- 7 The council demonstrates its commitment to employee health and wellbeing, through mandatory training for managers, supportive policies and practices, the Employee Assistance Programme, and other good people management initiatives as well as our workplace champions. Signing the commitment will help us move forward in a supported, structured way, enhancing current provision.
- 8 'Stamp It Out' is a local charity that is commissioned by Durham County Council to deliver work to address mental health stigma and discrimination. As part of this work, it co-ordinates and oversees the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment in County Durham and to date, 25 local organisations have become signatories.
- 9 The commitment comes at no cost, and by becoming a signatory, the council would not only demonstrate a corporate commitment to mental

¹ Stevenson, D and Farmer, P (2017) 'Thriving at Work: The Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers'. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf

health and wellbeing in the workplace, but it would also benefit from the quality, evidence-based resources provided by Mind.

- 10 Signatory organisations receive access to a range of communication and marketing material, this includes the Mental Health at Work Commitment logo (see appendix 2), internal communications templates, news items, staff emails, a power-point for staff briefings/meetings, guidance for producing blogs, external communications templates, including templates for media releases, recruitment webpage copy and guidance for social media posts.
- 11 Progress against core standards would be monitored through the Better Health at Work group that is chaired by the Corporate Director of Adults and Health Services.
- 12 The proposal for Durham County Council to become signatories has been supported by the Better Health at Work group, Corporate Management Team, and the Trade Unions.
- 13 If approved, it is planned to launch and promote the commitment during Mental Health Awareness Week in May, to both raise awareness (of the commitment) and encourage other local organisations to sign up and commit to improving workplace mental health and wellbeing. This was a successful means of promoting the previous Time to Change Employer Pledge, which saw engagement by County Durham Partnership organisations, as well as other public, private, and voluntary sector organisations.

Recommendation(s)

- 14 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report;
 - (b) agree that Durham County Council becomes a signatory to the MIND Mental Health at Work Commitment;
 - (c) encourage other organisations to become signatories to the commitment.

Background

- 15 Good mental health is fundamental to functioning well, it enables individuals to cope with the normal stressors of life, work productively, maintain healthy relationships, actively participate in the community, and reach their potential.
- 16 Work is a key influence on health, there is strong evidence to support being in good work has a positive impact on a person's health, wellbeing, and productivity.
- 17 Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing is one of the four priority areas of the County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28. Identified from the evidence base in the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment as one of the biggest contributors to people in County Durham dying early, living in poor health or with illness.

The County Durham picture

- 18 Durham Insight information, data, and research show:
 - Around 72, 302 (15.7%) people in County Durham are diagnosed as having depression (2022/23). This is higher than the England average (13.2%) and higher than the North East (15.0 %);
 - 3.6 % of school pupils in County Durham have social, emotional, and mental health needs (2022/23). This is statistically significantly worse than England (3.3%) and similar to the North East (3.6%);
 - Around 20.0% of adults have self -reported high anxiety (2022/23). This is similar to England (23.3%) and the North East (23.0%);
 - In 2022/2023, there were around 270 hospital admissions for self-harm (10 – 14-year-olds), that is 276.0 per 100, 000. This is better than England, (319 per 100, 000) and the North East (461 per 100, 000);
 - Between 2019-21 and 2020-22 (three year rolling average) the death rate for suicide has increased by 3.7%. This is higher than both the England and North East averages;
 - People in County Durham with severe mental illness are six times as likely to die prematurely than people who do not have severe mental illness (2018 – 20). This is statistically significantly worse than England averages and similar to the North East average;

- In 2019/20, there were 40, 125 new referrals into secondary mental health services, this is a rate of 7,691 per 100, 000. This is higher than England (6,897 per 100, 000) and similar to the North East (7672 per 100, 000) (All ages).

The national picture

- 19 The UK Health and Safety Executive (2022/23) reports that 1.8 million working people were suffering from a work-related illness, of which 875,000 reported work-related stress, depression, or anxiety.
- 20 This report also noted that 338,000 workers suffered from a new case of work-related stress, depression, or anxiety in 2022/23.

The County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28

- 21 This strategy is the overarching health and wellbeing place-based plan for County Durham and its vision is that County Durham is a healthy place, where people live well for longer.
- 22 It recognises that both mental and physical health are equally important and one of its four key priorities is to improve mental health, resilience, and wellbeing.

Mental Health Strategic Partnership

- 23 In County Durham, partners work together to improve mental health, resilience, and wellbeing, through the Mental Health Strategic Partnership focusing on the following key priorities:
- Improving the mental health of children and young people;
 - Suicide prevention;
 - Developing robust system responses for urgent and emergency mental health care;
 - Develop and implement a consistent dementia strategy;
 - Resilient communities;
 - Deliver and embed new transformed models of care for adults with serious mental health issues.
- 24 The partnership is developing fresh approaches to enable local residents to gain access to mental health support within their communities. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategic Plan 2023 –

2026 has five streams: children and young people, suicide prevention, urgent care, dementia, and resilient communities.

Children and Young Peoples Mental Health

- 25 The Health and Wellbeing Framework has been developed to provide structure and guidance to support schools and education settings in County Durham to improve the overall health and wellbeing of their children, young people, and staff.
- 26 Emotional Wellbeing Locality Forums, bring together mental health leads from education settings, and professionals from the wider mental health support system, to share knowledge, best practice and raise awareness the support available locally.
- 27 Durham County Council has adopted the THRIVE framework, an integrated, person centred, and needs led approach to organise support and deliver mental health services for children, young people, and their families. Examples of mental health and wellbeing support for children and young people in County Durham includes the; Anxious About School Project, Youth Aware of Mental Health programme, Nurturing Our Wellbeing programme, Emotional Health and Resilience team, the Piece of Mind team.

Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing

Wider Workplace

- 28 Durham County Council commissions the Pioneering Care Partnership, a local charity, to deliver the County Durham Workplace Health Programme.
- 29 This delivery includes the provision of information, advice, guidance, training and support to local public, private and voluntary sector organisations who want to improve workplace and workforce health. It offers a wide range of mental health and wellbeing training, such as Mental Health First Aid, mental health awareness and mental health training for managers.

Community Wealth Building

- 30 Durham County Council leads a project to develop 'Community Wealth Building' approaches across County Durham in collaboration with other local anchor organisations including County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust, and Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

- 31 A key focus of this work is to provide good quality, well paid job opportunities to those who are economically inactive or who have otherwise been disengaged or disenfranchised from the labour market (including those with long-term health conditions).
- 32 A 'jobs to communities' pathway are in development as well as a Durham Council 'pre-employment programme' that will help people develop the skills they need to be 'jobs ready.'

Durham County Council Workplace

- 33 The council has continued to prioritise and promote its workplace health and wellbeing agenda. In January 2024, the council was assessed for the Better Health at Work Award and has retained 'maintaining excellence' status.
- 34 The Better Health at Work strategic group is chaired by the Corporate Director of Adult and Health Services, adding accountability, corporate endorsement, and ambassadorship.
- 35 The council-wide staff engagement "Working Well" survey to assess workforce wellbeing and work-related stress was completed at the end of 2022. Consultation on the outcomes of survey has taken place and an action plan has been developed which identifies key priority areas. The results from the survey were very positive in the main, indicating much of the work related to employee wellbeing is making a difference. Progress against the action plan is monitored via the Better Health at Work group.
- 36 Sickness absence associated with mental health and statistics from occupational health continue to be monitored on an ongoing basis and significant effort continues in relation to prevention of poor health and sickness absence in addition to providing good oversight, management, and support where ill health does occur.
- 37 Deep Dive analysis of sickness absence is now provided enabling a targeted approach to areas of significant concern.
- 38 The council has continued to progress with supporting the organisation, and developing our comprehensive health and wellbeing offer to employees.
- 39 Workplace champions have been fully trained and recruited across the organisation, (currently there are 97 mental health first aiders, 60 health advocates, and 114 domestic abuse champions.)
- 40 The corporate wellbeing portal has been enhanced with a range of resources and signposting information.

- 41 The mandatory training and the wider learning and development offer relating to wellbeing been subject to ongoing review and monitoring.
- 42 The Employee Assistance Programme has been made available to all staff to compliment occupational health service provision.
- 43 The financial ability team provide advice, guidance, and training to support financial wellbeing.
- 44 The staff networks (Disability, Carers, Menopause, Armed Forces, LGBT+, Race Equality and Diversity) are administered by the Equality and Diversity and Human Resources Teams. The Chairs and Co-Chairs of the networks are staff who have volunteered to undertake the role.
- 45 The networks are a valuable source of support and community for employees, providing expertise and insight to the Corporate Management Team through engagement and consultation. Integral to the review, development and creation of training and guidance to foster an inclusive workplace environment.
- 46 These initiatives provide multiple established points of contact for staff to address any mental health and wellbeing needs.
- 47 The Time to Change employer pledge provided a framework that accelerated good work improving employee mental health.

Time to Change Employer Pledge

- 48 The Time to Change Employer Pledge was a commitment to changing the way we all think and act about mental health in the workplace. It supported employers to create a more open and understanding culture around mental health in the workplace, and tackle the stigma and discrimination generally associated with poor mental health.
- 49 Durham County Council became signatories of the employer pledge in 2018. This was supported by an action plan to improve workplace mental health, as well as annual campaigns to tackle stigma associated with mental health. These campaigns were supported by corporate champions and heads of service and engaged staff from across the council. Furthermore, these campaigns often saw many staff getting together and normalising mental health conversations.
- 50 As a result of funding issues, the Time to Change charity closed in March 2021.
- 51 In May 2021, a scoping paper was presented to the Public Health Senior Management Team that outlined three potential means of bridging this gap:

- the Mental Health at Work Commitment;
- the Mindful Employer Scheme;
- the Better Health at Work Award.

52 It was agreed that the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment was the preferred choice due to similarities with the original Time to Change Employer Pledge. However, this was not progressed due to priorities relating to COVID.

The Mental Health at Work Commitment

53 The commitment is a roadmap to achieving better mental health outcomes for employees. It comprises a set of six key standards and supporting actions that any organisation can follow to improve and support the mental health of their people. The Commitment's ambition is to encourage employers of all sizes to join this national movement and improve standards of mental health care among the workforce. The key standards are:-

- prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity;
- proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes;
- promote an open culture around mental health;
- increase organisational confidence and capability;
- provide mental health tools and support;
- increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.

54 Promotion, co-ordination, and oversight of the commitment is undertaken by 'Stamp it Out,' a County Durham charity committed to eliminating the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health. There are currently 25 signatory organisations in County Durham.

55 The proposal for Durham County Council to become signatories has been supported by the Better Health at Work group, Corporate Management Team, and the Trade Unions.

Main Implications

What does the commitment involve?

- 56 The commitment is free to sign up (no subscription or administration costs) and demonstrates an organisation's public commitment to improving employee mental health. It is not an accreditation and there is no assessment; therefore, organisations are not asked to provide or submit any evidence on an ongoing basis.
- 57 The purpose of the commitment is to signal an organisation's intention to improve employee mental health and provide a framework to support organisations on that journey. There are six standards (see above) underpinned by twenty-one supporting actions, with guidance for implementation, and signposting to useful resources (see appendix 3).
- 58 The framework does not dictate any mandatory activity or processes under which the actions are delivered. The commitment is nationally recognised and evidence-based with many locally and nationally recognised organisations as current signatories.

Requirements

- 59 One person can sign up on behalf of an organisation and an appointed representative will receive email communication from Mind. The signatory must have the authority to commit the organisation to the commitment. Signing up requires the support of senior leadership to implement the standards and underpinning activity.

Monitoring and Tracking Progress Against the Standards

- 60 Signatories to the commitment receive an action plan template, to help assess organisational activity and map existing work against the standards. The action plan can be used to identify gaps and areas requiring new interventions or support.
- 61 Mental Health campaigns promoted throughout the year include:
- Time to Talk Day in February;
 - Mental Health Awareness Week in May;
 - World Mental Health Day in October.
- 62 These campaigns, subsequent evaluations of their effectiveness, and results of the Better Health at Work Award bi-annual Health Needs Assessment survey, will provide a means to assess employee needs, measure outcomes and monitor progress.

- 63 The Durham County Council staff 'Working Well Survey,' annual sickness deep dive, and quarterly report from the Employee Assistance Programme provided by Health Assured provide useful insight into workplace mental health and wellbeing. The data from these pieces of work, as well as those data gathered from workplace health surveys, will inform, and support the work undertaken by Durham County Council against the Commitment and its core standards.
- 64 The Working Well Survey and its accompanying action plan are a standard agenda item on the Better Health at Work group, and it is proposed that this group will monitor progress.

Launch

- 65 If approved, it is planned to launch the commitment during Mental Health Awareness Week, which is an important, national campaign.
- 66 The launch will be supported by local communication and promotion which will not only raise awareness of the commitment as a means to improving workplace health and wellbeing, but also encourage other County Durham organisations to follow suit. This was a successful means of promoting the previous Time to Change Employer Pledge, which saw engagement by County Durham Partnership organisations, as well as other public, private, and voluntary sector organisations.

Conclusion

- 67 Durham County Council continues to challenge mental health stigma and discrimination as part of its ongoing commitment to improving workplace health and wellbeing.
- 68 Good work to improve the health and wellbeing of employees started with Time to Change, and the Mind Mental Health at Work commitment will continue this good work.
- 69 Becoming a signatory to the commitment firmly demonstrates Durham County Council's ongoing commitment to ensuring a healthy and happy workplace and workforce.

Background papers

- None.

Other useful documents

- None.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

None. The Mental Health at Work commitment is free of charge.

Consultation and Engagement

This matter has been discussed between report authors and Stamp It Out as the coordinators of the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment in County Durham. Furthermore, Trade Unions have been updated and consulted on these proposals. Recommendations have been agreed for consideration by CMT.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

A mental health condition is considered a disability if it has a long-term on normal day to day activities. Disability is one of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010, which states that public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

Mental health is a fundamental human right.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

The proposals set out in the report support our commitment to be a good employer as part of the Durham County Council Workforce Strategy.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

Appendix 2: Mental Health at Work Commitment logo

Thank you for signing up to the Mental Health at Work Commitment. As a signatory, you are permitted to make use of the Mental Health at Work logo in digital materials and physical collateral with reference to your having taken the Commitment, for two years beginning on the date on which you signed up.

You will find more details, and full terms and conditions, in the guidelines below.

- [Download the guidelines](#) for using the Mental Health at Work brand in your materials.
- [Download a high-resolution copy of the Mental Health at Work Commitment logo](#), for use as specified in the guidelines.

**MENTAL
HEALTH
AT WORK
COMMITMENT**

[The Mental Health at Work Commitment: using our logo – Mental Health At Work](#)

Appendix 3: Standard implementation resources

The Mental Health at Work Commitment **STANDARD 1**

1. Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity

A mental health at work plan; Senior ownership and board-level accountability; Routine monitoring of employee wellbeing; Feedback from employees driving improvements.

Some resources to get you started:

[People managers' guide to mental health](#)

[The Acas framework for positive mental health at work](#)

[How to implement the Thriving At Work mental health standards in your workplace](#)

2. Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes

Good physical workplace conditions, Employee feedback on work design conditions and culture, Attention to job design organisational structure working patterns and expectations, Work life balance and flexibility, Openness during recruitment and throughout employment.

Some resources to get you started:

[Wellbeing in small business: how you can help](#)

[Wellbeing at work](#)

[Managing mental health in changing business models](#)

[Employing disabled people and people with health conditions](#)

3. Promote an open culture around mental health

Increased awareness and stigma being challenged, Empowered employees as champions and role models, open two-way conversations, and clear support.

Some resources to get you started:

[This is Me](#)

[Take 10 Together: Starting the conversation](#)

[The importance of Time To Talk Day](#)

4. Increase organisational confidence and capability

Mental health literacy and opportunities to learn, Staff prepared for effective mental health conversations and signposting, Line managers trained in all aspects of workplace mental health, Employee mental health built into all managers' roles.

Some resources to get you started:

[Talking toolkit: preventing work-related stress](#)

[People managers' guide to mental health](#)

[Approaching a sensitive conversation around mental ill health](#)

[Suicide prevention training from the Zero Suicide Alliance](#)

[Training, support, and consultancy services](#)

[Leadership Insights: How can you create a more mentally healthy workplace?](#)

5. Provide mental health tools and support

Staff aware of resources and tools available, Tailored in-house support and signposting to further options, Targeted help for particular issues.

Some resources to get you started:

[Every Mind Matters](#)

[Employee assistance programme standards framework](#)

[Find more resources to suit your organisation on Mental Health at Work](#)

6. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting

Internal and external reporting on key measures, Activities and impact measured using standardised frameworks.

Some resources to get you started:

[Mind's Workplace Wellbeing Index](#)

[Responsible Business Tracker](#)

[Voluntary reporting framework on disability, mental health, and wellbeing](#)

[CMHA Guide: Thriving at Work](#)