

A framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham businesses

Report of Amanda Healy, Director of Public Health, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update on the development and implementation of the 'Framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham businesses' and its associated services. Please find the Framework attached at Appendix 2.

Executive Summary

- 2 Small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations are less likely, as a result of their size and potentially limited resources, to have equitable access to good quality mental health training and support for owners and employees.
- 3 The negative impact of poor mental health and wellbeing in these workplaces is likely to be bigger – in terms of staff absence and reduced productivity
- 4 The 'Framework for good workforce mental health and wellbeing in County Durham businesses' has been developed in conjunction with local business specialists and contains a set of key actions that aim to tackle workplace mental health stigma and discrimination, improve general mental health awareness and promote the importance of good workforce mental health
- 5 Durham County Council has commissioned and procured two key county-wide services for owners, managers and employees within SME and VCS organisations: An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and a mental health training hub. These services can be accessed without charge by eligible organisations. Both programmes have been fully funded for two years and are now fully operational.

- 6 Other objectives within the framework focus on areas such as campaigns/communications, collaborative working and promotions to improve awareness of these issues and effect more action in the workplace by target organisations to address these matters. Furthermore, the framework has been reviewed and covers matters relating to COVID-19.
- 7 It is important that businesses also have access to the broader range of information and actions outlined in this framework so that they are able to effectively navigate their respective workforces towards a good state of mental health and wellbeing.
- 8 Following approval, the framework will be circulated to businesses across the region.

Recommendations

- 9 Members of The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to:
 - (a) Note the contents and objectives of the framework
 - (b) Provide any feedback on the framework.

Background

- 10 This framework and its constituent actions have their genesis in the Local Government Association Mental Health at Scale programme, identified by the County Durham Partnership as a multi-agency priority. Whilst the programme in County Durham has a focus on young people, workforce and the community, this paper relates to the progress that has been made against the workplace priority – a key setting in which to promote and protect mental health.
- 11 The target population are those working in County Durham businesses and VCS organisations employing fewer than 250 people. Larger organisations that are well-resourced in terms of human resources support and training and development functions are more likely to be able to provide good quality mental health training and support than their smaller counterparts. Furthermore, the negative impact of poor mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is likely to be bigger for smaller organisations – in terms of staff absence and reduced productivity.

The Framework

- 12 This has been developed in conjunction with business specialists from Business Durham, the Federation of Small Businesses and the County Durham Economic Partnership. A key objective is to redress the balance in terms of providing access to quality mental health training and support to its target population.
- 13 The framework, therefore, sets out a clear mission:
 - (a) ‘Within the County Durham Partnership, Durham County Council will work with local businesses to reduce the stigma associated with poor mental health and develop equitable access to good workforce mental health and wellbeing training and support’
- 14 It was scheduled for launch during Mental Health Awareness Week, May 2020; however, this was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result of the pandemic, the framework has been reviewed and updated to include appropriate COVID-19 related references and content.
- 15 It contains a foreword from Professor Brian Tanner, the previous Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership, who provided valuable advice on the proposed content of the framework. It is proposed that his foreword remains within the document as it is highly relevant, and it would also stand as a legacy to his contribution

Actions and Objectives

- 16 The framework contains a set of key actions that aim to tackle workplace mental health stigma and discrimination, improve general mental health awareness and promote the importance of good workforce mental health.
- 17 In pursuit of these goals, Durham County Council has commissioned and procured two key county-wide services for owners, managers and employees within small and medium sized businesses (SME) and VCS organisations: An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and a mental health training hub. These services can be accessed without charge by eligible organisations. Both programmes have been fully funded for two years.
- 18 Other objectives within the framework focus on areas such as campaigns/communications, collaborative working and promotions to improve awareness of these issues and effect more action in the workplace by target organisations to address these matters.

Employee Assistance Programme

- 19 People Asset Manager Ltd (PAM Assist) has been commissioned to provide this service. Through this service, employees of eligible organisations will have telephone access to experienced and accredited advisors who are trained to help and provide practical assistance on a range of matters including financial matters, divorce, separation, bereavement, family conflict, mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse. Initial advice is available by telephone 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The commission also includes access to telephone and online counselling where this is assessed as clinically required.
- 20 This service has been launched and is now operational. A dedicated account manager is now overseeing marketing and promotion of the programme to target organisations in County Durham.

County Durham Training Hub

- 21 Hartlepool and East Durham MIND (HEDM) has been commissioned to provide mental health training to SME and VCS organisations across the county. MIND is an industry leader in the field of mental health, and HEDM is a well-established organisation with valuable local knowledge.
- 22 The commission includes provision of the following training programmes:
 - (a) Mental Health First Aid

- (b) General mental health awareness
 - (c) Mental health awareness for managers
 - (d) Managing stress and improving personal resilience
 - (e) Tackling mental health stigma
- 23 As a result of ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, workshops and programmes of learning will initially be offered virtually or by distance learning. Subject to easing of lockdown restrictions, face-to-face and blended learning will also be available. Furthermore, the provider is developing a system of mutual support that will encourage local organisations to collaborate and support each other to create healthier workplaces.
- 24 This service was launched on 5 August 2020 and is now operational. The programme is accessible via a dedicated website and telephone line.

Workforce Mental Health and Covid-19

- 25 Whilst local, regional, national and international efforts have focussed upon reducing the transmission of COVID-19 and minimising its impact upon the physical health of our populations, the mental health aspect of this pandemic has been recognised as the 'emergency within the emergency'. The impact of this aspect of the pandemic is particularly relevant to business owners and their employees, who have been affected by lockdown measures and particularly affected by its economic impact.
- 26 Measures to control transmission of COVID-19 have delivered a shock to both the economy and public finances. The pandemic has also significantly impacted upon businesses and the labour market. HMRC reported that after rising for several years, the number of employees on payroll has fallen in recent months. Regionally, the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey shows that between February and April 2020, North-East England had the highest unemployment rate in the UK. HMRC data released for June 2020 indicated that 63,900 employees in County Durham (around 30% of total employment) had been furloughed, with concerns about potentially significant redundancies as the scheme starts to taper down from August onwards.
- 27 Matters such as these are highly likely to increase prevalence of mental health issues across the County Durham business estate. The EAP is, therefore, a timely service that will provide access to support for those affected. Furthermore, the training hub is a key programme that will enable business owners to access training (at no cost) to improve

employee mental health and wellbeing and increase resilience during these uncertain times.

Next Steps

- 28 Public health continues to work with Business Durham to ensure that these programmes are included in a package of measures that are being made available to support County Durham businesses as they move into the recovery phase of COVID-19. Public Health is represented on the Business, Economy, Regeneration and Strategy Group (and its Business Support sub-group) for this purpose.
- 29 Whilst marketing and promotion of both the EAP and the County Durham Training Hub are now ongoing, it is important that businesses also have access to the broader range of information and actions (outlined in this framework) so that they are able to effectively navigate their respective workforces towards a good state of mental health and wellbeing.
- 30 Accordingly, once this framework has been approved, it will be circulated to businesses across the region via specialist business organisations (Business Durham, Federation of Small Businesses, North East England Chamber of Commerce), Business Durham affiliated local networks and other well-established business networks across County Durham (Durham BID, Durham Business Group, Derwentside Business Network, etc). Furthermore, the framework will be circulated via DCC service groups that also have established networks (Economic Regeneration/REAL and Area Action Partnerships).
- 31 It is also important that appropriate DCC services and partnerships have sight of the framework and its documents.

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

Services commissioned as part of this framework have been financed through the Mental Health at Scale budget.

Consultation

The framework has been produced in consultation with a range of internal and external stakeholders, including small and medium sized businesses operating in County Durham.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The framework is designed to improve equitable access to training and support for those organisations that may not have formerly had the capacity or resources for such provision.

Climate Change

The recommendations of this report have minimal impact on climate change consideration.

Human Rights

Human rights are not affected by the recommendations of this report.

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

This framework relates to the County Durham business estate, comprising over 13,000 private sector organisations, of which around 99% are small and medium sized. Risks associated with implementing and delivering services at this scale is mitigated by structured provider marketing and communications

plans and ongoing contract monitoring by the commissioner. Should demand outweigh supply capacity, providers will endeavour to equitably deliver services on a sub-regional and sector basis.

Procurement

Services outlined in this report (EAP and Training Hub) have been procured by Public Health with support from DCC Commissioning and Procurement teams.

Appendix 2: A framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham businesses

Attached as a separate document.