

A framework for good workforce mental health in County Durham businesses



POWERED

Ensuring our workplaces are safe, healthy and committed to promoting staff wellbeing is a key step to ensuring that the right people will come to work in County Durham and stay in County Durham.

BY

PEOPLE

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Foreword

Sue Parkinson, Vice Chair of the County Durham Economic Partnership

Mental health, wellbeing and prosperity are inseparably linked, but that interconnection can be overlooked if economic activity is measured solely in financial terms. The County Durham Economic Partnership recognises the economic importance of supporting business leaders to improve and sustain the mental health of their workforces and is strongly supportive of the initiative and proposed actions described in this document. We encourage all business owners and leaders to avail themselves of the facilities and provisions being offered and spread the associated good practice through their own local networks.

The Economic Partnership also recognises that, in a County where the majority of businesses are very small, owner managers themselves are often at greatest risk in succumbing to mental illness. In taking the stigma out of discussion of mental health, the action plan supports better understanding of the pressures and drivers of poor mental health and through this to enable positive steps to improve the health of all involved in business activity. The approach is inclusive, and success will lead not only to a greater sense of wellbeing within the whole County Durham workforce but also enhanced economic prosperity through more productive and profitable businesses.

Sarah Slaven, Managing Director (interim), Business Durham

Durham County Council established Business Durham as the economic development arm of the Council, to enable growth, create jobs and improve lives in the County. We connect businesses with the funding, premises, advice and specialist support they need to grow and thrive. We also recognise the challenges faced every day by businesses (and owner managers in particular) in balancing economic success with the health and wellbeing of the workforce.

Business Durham commends this programme to challenge mental health stigma, and to draw upon the resources to support positive mental health in the workplace.

For after all, a healthy workforce is a more productive one, and with improved lives so contributes to the economic success of the County.

Michael McMeekin, North East Area Leader, Federation of Small Businesses

Mental health is a huge challenge for society. Government, business owners, and each of us as individuals can work together to help destigmatise mental health and create an open environment where we can all talk about, and take care of, each other's mental health.

An estimated 300,000 people lose their job each year due to a mental health problem, something no employer – most of whom rightly take great pride in their role employing people – should want.

Despite this, many employees are still reluctant to talk about mental health at work. We believe that business owners must play a critical role in talking about mental health in the workplace and lead the way in both destigmatising mental health in the workplace and acting to help our people when they are struggling.

By both talking about it and addressing it, we can help promote an open environment where people feel comfortable talking about the issues that are affecting them, work out what positive changes we can make in the workplace, and make some progress to help each other.

Arlen Pettitt, Knowledge and Development Manager, North East England Chamber of Commerce

Not only is addressing poor mental health in the workplace morally the right thing to do, it's also economically the right thing to do. Businesses which have a happy, health workforce are more productive, more resilient and better able to grow.

The North East has a skilled and passionate workforce, and its only right that businesses invest the time and resources necessary to ensure their employees have fulfilling careers, a good work-life balance and are given the support they need to thrive.

The Chamber has made workplace mental health a central pillar of our work, encouraging our members from across North East England to take action. We're pleased to support this plan and hope that together we can tackle stigma and discrimination and work towards better mental health for the whole of County Durham and the wider region.

Business Durham 



Introduction

In County Durham we have a proud heritage of innovation and industry and boast a thriving business estate representing a diverse range of industries and sectors. All of our organisations are powered by hard working and committed people and it is important that we continue to attract and retain the best to sustain business development and growth. Ensuring our workplaces are safe, healthy and committed to promoting staff wellbeing is a key step to ensuring that the right people will come to work in County Durham and stay in County Durham.

Challenges

Larger organisations that are well resourced in terms of human resources and training and development functions are more likely to be able to provide good training and support to raise awareness of the importance of good mental health, reduce stigma and foster a supportive environment for employees. Our small and medium sized businesses may not be as well-equipped or able to do so and staff absence can really impact upon smaller organisations to a bigger extent than their larger counterparts. This presents real potential for unfairness in terms of protecting workforce mental health and providing access to training and support. A significant challenge to businesses locally, regionally and nationally is the impact of the coronavirus as we move forward into recovery.

Actions

The County Durham Partnership is committed to working with local businesses to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and to developing fair access to good quality training. This plan introduces a set of objectives and actions to reduce stigma and improve workforce mental health. We can achieve this by working with the County Durham Time to Change hub to tackle mental health stigma, and with local business specialists to create an offer of training and support which can be accessed by those organisations who don't have such provision. Our work is supported by senior level commitment from these organisations we are working with and is bolstered by local promotion of products and commitments such as 'Time to Change'.

Conclusion

Positive and healthy workplaces make for happier, healthier and more productive employees. Good mental health and wellbeing is a crucial aspect of the health of our workforce here in County Durham and is particularly important in the context of the additional pressures many businesses face as a result COVID-19. The County Durham Partnership recognises the contribution that good workplace mental health makes to the success of our local businesses, the thriving local economy and the health of our communities and it is committed to tackling mental health stigma and discrimination and to improving the mental health and wellbeing our employees.

Our state of health affects almost all aspects of our personal, family and working lives. We are, however, now more than ever aware of the role of wellbeing and how it affects our physical and mental health, and our capacity to lead happy and productive lives. The outbreak of COVID-19 globally, for example, is a stark reminder of the importance of good health, and how poor wellbeing can impact our day to day lives

Workforce mental health and wellbeing is important to those of us who work in the many businesses and organisations which are located here in County Durham. Conditions such as anxiety, stress and depression can cause absence and lower levels of productivity and too often employees may not want to explain such issues to their manager,¹ and managers often don't like to confront them. Indeed, as highlighted in reviews of workplace mental health,² whilst at any one-time many employees will be thriving, others shift between thriving, struggling and those who are ill, and possibly off work.

Mental health and wellbeing issues can mean so much more for small and medium sized business owners who face unique workplace challenges and pressures, and who may not necessarily have systems or functions in place to handle them. Much of a business owner's time is likely to be taken up by generating new business and ensuring high quality services for existing customers so that their business can thrive, and staff can be paid.

Figure 1: Three phases of people experience in work



Source: 'Thriving at Work' (2017)

Failing to talk about or address mental health and wellbeing can, however, be damaging for owners

and staff, as low levels of good mental health and happiness at work can have a big effect on motivation, drive and productivity.

Despite what we know about the benefits of good workforce mental health, a recent report states that SMEs must still prioritise mental health and well-being as they aren't fully aware of just how much these issues can either affect or benefit their businesses.

The report also tells us that some owners just don't have enough information about the best ways to help their staff.

Matters relating to workforce mental health and wellbeing are more so important in light of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. A recent publication by CIPD highlighted that early indications suggest the pandemic (and measures taken by government to control it such as lockdown and social distancing) will have a significant impact upon the mental health of employees. It is very possible that these mental health implications will be felt for many months and even years.

Good mental health is a strategic priority for Durham County Council and improving and promoting good workforce mental health is a key part of its overall health and wellbeing strategy. Indeed, promoting good mental health at scale is a key public health priority whose aim is to support local businesses and organisations to take action about mental health whilst working to reduce the stigma and discrimination often associated with poor mental health. Furthermore, one of the strategic ambitions outlined in the 'Vision for County Durham 2019 – 2035'⁴ is the creation of more and better jobs, and workplace health and wellbeing is an important part of this.

Durham County Council, in collaboration with its partners, has examined the potential health impact of COVID-19 upon health inequalities, including impact upon our mental health. We know that adults

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may experience stress and anxiety, fear of the unknown and lack of access to family support mechanisms and services. These factors have the capacity to affect our personal and working lives.

Furthermore, the 'County Durham Approach to Wellbeing',⁵ which has been developed and implemented to prevent ill-health through good wellbeing, recognises the impact that coping with stress at work or at home can have on our strength and ability to cope.

This document will tell you why the County Durham Partnership has created this plan to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of those who work in County Durham. It will explain how we will work together with businesses across the county to improve workforce mental health and wellbeing and provide fair access to good training and support.



Definitions of health and wellbeing⁶

Wellbeing is defined within County Durham's 'Approach to Wellbeing'⁷ as everything that is important to people and their lives. In economic terms wellbeing, or its absence, can be responsible for levels of productivity, benefit dependence and absenteeism. In human terms, it can be described as 'how we are doing' and 'how satisfied we are with our lives'.

Mental wellbeing, as defined by Mind, describes your mental state. Mental wellbeing is dynamic. An individual can be of relatively good mental wellbeing, despite the presence of a mental illness. If you have good mental wellbeing you are able to:

- Feel relatively confident in yourself and have positive self-esteem
- Feel and express a range of emotions
- Build and maintain good relationships with others
- Feel engaged with the world around you
- Live and work productively
- Cope with the stresses of everyday life, including work-related stress
- Adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty⁸

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a state of mental and psychological wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Mental health is determined by a range of socioeconomic, biological and environmental factors.⁹

Work-related stress, as defined by the WHO, is the response people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their abilities leading to an inability to cope, especially when employees feel they have little support from supervisors as well as little control over work processes.¹⁰

We can't have good health without good mental health. It means being able to think, feel and react in the ways that help us live good and happy lives.¹¹ Finding it difficult to manage how we feel, act or handle some of the stresses of daily life are all signs that we need to pay some attention to our mental health.

Much of our adult lives is spent at work, and in terms of our general health and wellbeing good employment brings benefits such as a sense of self-worth, identity and purpose. Good wellbeing creates self-confidence, brings us a sense of pride and helps us to earn enough to be self-sufficient, support our families and do the pleasurable things in life.

We work in many different types of settings. Indeed, as technology evolves, so does the nature of the places where we can do our work. Many of us now work from home or from multiples sites across our own organisation. This has been particularly evident as a result of government imposed measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. The rapid growth of mobile technology means that we are available to our employers more than ever, and this means that work and personal lives are now increasingly blurred. These factors can all affect our general mental health.

As well as work/life balance, there are other aspects of work that can affect our mental health. These include the type of work we do, our working environment or the support available to us.¹² COVID-19, for example, has had a significant effect on the economy and the labour market, resulting in an uncertain future for many organisations and their respective workforces. Such concerns are likely to

have a negative impact upon business owners and employees. If our wellbeing is affected by any of these issues, it could mean that we don't work to our full potential (presenteeism), that we might be absent from work or that as an employer, you may have higher staff turnover.

Mental health stigma remains a real issue. As a result, we may not ask for help and support from colleagues or employers or seek medical help. In the worst cases, we may report being treated unfairly. It may be that as a manager, you might avoid this subject in fear of making matters worse or provoking further consequences, legally or otherwise. This shows that we really need to have these conversations.¹³

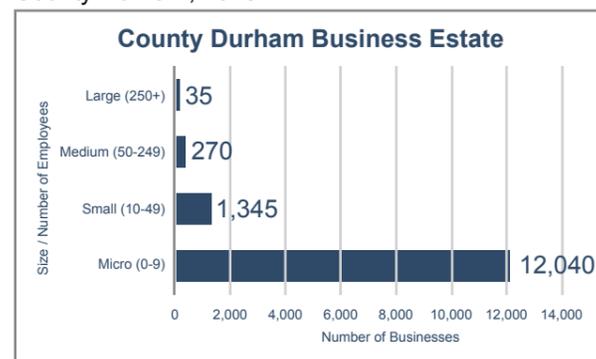
Nationally, the cost of poor mental health to the UK economy is between £74 billion and £99 billion, with a direct cost to employers estimated at between £33 billion and £42 billion.¹⁴ The Health and Safety Executive¹⁵ reported between 2018/19, 602,000 workers suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety in Great Britain, resulting in 12.8 million lost working days. These conditions accounted for 44% of all work-related ill health cases and 54% of all working days lost due to ill health.

We know that these issues are not exclusive to employees. Research shows that a third of small and medium sized business leaders suffer from poor mental health, with over three quarters believing that these problems affect their ability to work effectively. The uncertain economic outlook for many business owners is likely to increase this number. Despite this, almost a third of business leaders believe that their organisations do not provide adequate mental health support in the workplace.¹⁶

1. Where are we now and why do we need a Framework for good workforce Mental Health in County Durham?

Let's start by looking at some of the data relating to the County Durham workforce. In 2018, the total number of jobs in County Durham was 202,000, of which 170,000 were employee jobs.¹⁹ During this same period, the total number of businesses in County Durham was 13,685 (figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of businesses by size in County Durham, 2018



Source: NOMIS (2019)

In terms of the amount of work-related stress, depression or anxiety by type of work (or industry group), the national data shows that the average rate over the three-year period 2016/17 – 2018/19 was 1,380 cases per 100,000 workers. This increased to 2,500 for workers in public administration and defence; 2,120 for those in health and social work activity and 1,940 for those in education.²⁰ This is particularly relevant when considering that the latter three industry categories employ one third of the total employee workforce in County Durham.

In 2019, 2,531 businesses started-up in County Durham, representing an increase of 196 when compared to 2018 figures.²¹ The data shows that our county is an attractive place for those starting a new business. It is very important that the County Durham Partnership works with its partners to ensure that our workplaces are healthy and able to foster and maintain good workforce mental health and wellbeing.



Efforts to improve workplace health are not new to us here in County Durham as we are part of the Better Health at Work Award (North East) partnership. This free scheme was created for businesses that are interested in raising awareness of health and wellbeing and engaging and motivating staff to promote productivity, whilst gaining recognition for this in the form of an award. Furthermore, we benefit from a County Durham Time to Change hub, which is committed to embedding anti-stigma and discrimination in local schools, workplaces and other community settings.

Whilst this framework has a specific focus on workforce mental health and wellbeing, it has been designed to fit with the Better Health at Work Award (County Durham). Indeed, those implementing measures to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their employees will find that this work will be recognised by the award scheme.

2. What are the drivers for change?

We now know and understand more about our mental health than ever before. There is no doubt that public interest in mental health and wellbeing has grown significantly over the past 10 years.²²

We do, however, need to have more conversations around the stigma associated with mental health. High profile commitments from organisations such as Time to Change continue to tackle this issue through education and awareness raising. In 2019, County Durham won a bid to become one of eight national Time to Change funded hubs that are working to end negative attitudes and behaviours towards people experiencing mental health problems.

Lots of policies, studies and reports about workplace mental health and wellbeing have been published by organisations such as Deloitte,²³ CIPD,²⁴ Business in the Community²⁵ ACAS,²⁶ Mind,²⁷ Federation of Small Businesses. They all give us sound evidence and recommendations which are key drivers for this framework.

Locally, good workforce mental health is one of the key strategic priorities for the County Durham Partnership and a new 'Approach to Wellbeing' is being implemented to create an environment for a lasting legacy of wellbeing for those who live and work across our county. The 'Vision for County Durham 2019 – 2035' outlines plans to create a future where there are more and better jobs across the county and where people live long and independent lives. We want our workplaces and our workforce to be healthy, and free from the stigma and discrimination so often associated with poor mental health.

More recently, our combined response to the coronavirus pandemic is an important driver for change. As well identifying and addressing key issues relating to our future physical and economic health and wellbeing, it is crucial that we prioritise actions to identify, address, maintain and improve the mental health and wellbeing of our working population by ensuring equitable access to support and training.



So what does this mean for us here in County Durham? We are committed to attracting and retaining talented people and to creating and keeping a healthy workforce. We know that healthy and happy workplaces will help us achieve this, and to do so Durham County Council and the County Durham Partnership have made mental health as a key strategic priority. Workplace mental health is a key part of this.



3. Where do we want to be?

We want everyone working in businesses across County Durham to understand how they can play a part of making our workplaces happy and healthy.

Figure 4: Acas framework for positive mental health at work



We also want to drive home the message that responsibility for positive wellbeing and productive workplaces is shared between employers, managers and employees.²⁹ In order to achieve this:

- Employers must tackle the causes of workplace stress, reduce stigma and support and train managers
- Managers must build rapport with staff, have confidence and knowledge in managing mental health, handle difficult conversations effectively and support work/life balance
- Employees must look after their own wellbeing, use positive coping strategies, engage with line managers and take notice and support colleagues

Working together we can make changes by having open and honest conversations about these issues. By creating fair access to training and support, we believe that we can improve workforce wellbeing by raising mental health awareness and helping staff, managers and employers to make positive change.

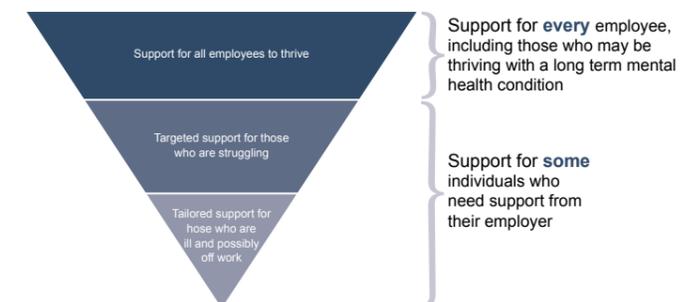


4. How do we get there?

We know that good training provision and support will help us to achieve these objectives. Durham County Council and the County Durham Economic Partnership have based their approach on evidence from the Public Health England competency framework³⁰ and findings from the most recent government review of workplace mental health (figure 5).³¹

We have talked about the importance of fair access to training for those businesses that may not have as the same resources as their larger counterparts to provide mental health training and support. To improve access, we intend to:

Figure 5: Levels of support that can be offered by employers



Source: *Thriving at work (2017)*

1. Create and finance a tailored and sustainable mental health training programme which can be accessed by eligible businesses and organisations. This will provide the skills that employers, managers and employees need to achieve good workplace mental health. Topics such as mental health awareness, mental health first aid, stress management and increasing personal resilience will be included in this package.
2. Strengthen and support good workforce mental health by funding an employee assistance programme which can be accessed by employees from eligible businesses and organisations. Employees will be able to access services which will help them to address issues that may affecting their work performance, health or wellbeing.
3. Promote methods of identifying and addressing workplace mental health issues through use of existing quality and evidence-based resources. Business in the Community, for example, has produced a comprehensive document, *Mental health toolkit for employers*,³² which contains a wealth of advice, guidance and signposting to resources to help businesses identify, address and improve workplace mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, MIND has created the *'Mental Health at Work gateway'*³³ which has brought together multiple resources to support employee mental health.
4. Encourage employers to reduce mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace by committing to change the way we all think and act about mental health in the workplace.

You will also see that we are working with specialists from the County Durham Economic Partnership, including Business Durham and the Federation of Small Businesses to ensure that our work will continue in the long-term and that what we seek to achieve is relevant to the needs of businesses and employees across County Durham.

5. Key actions

Our plan is focussed around a set of objectives that aim to: reduce mental health stigma and discrimination; improve general awareness and promote the importance of good mental health; provide support for those who are thriving, struggling or possibly absent from work as a result of mental ill-health.

In order to achieve our vision and mission, we will:

Strategic objective:	Actions:
1. Change attitudes to mental health in the workplace by tackling stigma and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote, encourage and support businesses to make a commitment to address stigma and discrimination b. County Durham 'Time to Change' hub to provide advice and guidance where appropriate
2. Build a strong guiding collaboration to achieve good workforce mental health across County Durham businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Durham County Council to establish and progress a collaboration with local organisations which promote and advance interests of local business community (e.g. Business Durham, Federation of Small Businesses)
3. Address issues specific to small and micro businesses in the adoption and implementation of workplace mental health measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage representatives from County Durham small and micro businesses to obtain their views and perspectives in relation to workplace mental health b. Incorporate this data into models of training and support provision to ensure that needs specific to this sector are addressed
4. Create and communicate key messages to support the promotion of good workforce mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support advertising campaigns to promote key local, national programmes such as World Mental Health day, Time to Talk day and National Mental Health Awareness Week b. Ensure that any healthy workplace messages or campaigns are specific in their support of improving and protecting mental health to ensure parity of esteem between mental and physical health
5. Promote suitable toolkits for implementation by County Durham businesses to improve workforce mental health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Establish which products and toolkits are available to businesses in County Durham to assist in assessing and improving workplace mental health b. Work with local business organisations to select appropriate products c. Promote products through in conjunction with County Durham business organisations and their established networks
6. Establish a funded shared resource to improve equitable access to, and incentivise engagement with, mental health training and employee support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Working with local business organisations, consider methods available to enable County Durham businesses to share training resources (i.e. online and face to face) b. Facilitate and drive sub-regional collaboration on the basis of geographical location, industry or business type (e.g. SME clusters, business parks) c. Provide finance/funding to establish a SME mental health training and support hub. Consider long-term plan to encourage members to mutually fund future services and ensure sustainability of model
7. With the County Durham Economic Partnership, investigate the potential (and methods) for local business organisations to include promotion of the workplace mental health agenda in their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Seek agreement from named organisations to commit to supporting this agenda when dealing with existing and potential service-users b. Scope existing support arrangements and explore the potential for workplace mental health and wellbeing (i.e. Thriving at Work recommendations) to be included within these arrangements³⁴
8. Increase awareness of workplace mental health through a programme of workplace wellbeing initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Linking in with the North East Better Health at Work Award, promote workplace mental health through a series of workplace wellbeing initiatives throughout the year
9. Maximise the reach of the workplace mental health agenda across County Durham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. On a sub-regional basis, identify organisations who will promote the workplace mental health agenda amongst their network b. Engage these organisations to expand circle of influence and ensure maximum coverage of agenda
10. Develop a baseline and measurable targets to measure reach and impact of the framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Engage local businesses through existing business networks including the County Durham Partnership, Business Durham and the Federation of Small Businesses b. Monitor business engagement and undertake analysis to measure reach and impact

6. Conclusion

Pick up a business prospectus and it is likely to tell you that its people are its greatest asset. Nationally, we can see an increasing understanding of good mental health as a crucial part of our general health, a vital ingredient within our communities and an essential element of a healthy and productive workforce. Locally, we have built a whole new approach to wellbeing which recognises good employment as key to health and happy communities. And we have a clear vision for a future County Durham in which people live long and independent lives and benefit from more and better jobs

For too long, matters relating to mental health in the workplace have been left unaddressed; despite clear messages that without a healthy workforce we will see lost productivity and increased absenteeism at a cost to both the employee and the employer. Times, however, are changing. We now know that there can be no health without good mental health. We are all now acutely aware of the importance of good physical and mental health as a result our experience living and working during a global pandemic that has impacted upon our personal and working lives. Furthermore, we are reducing the stigma relating to poor mental health through high profile campaigns and commitments and the great work of those organisations who are ready to smash through the stereotypes. It is now time to normalise this issue!

The objectives introduced in this framework are ambitious; however, by working together here in County Durham, our healthy workforce will be one which is motivated, engaged, productive and envied.

“Our people are our strength, our inspiration and our advantage – they are good for business, your business”

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