

Employee health and wellbeing policy

Policy Statement

Oxford City Council recognises the value of maintaining the health and wellbeing of its employees. The Council recognises that employees' wellbeing and performance are linked: by improving employees' wellbeing we should improve individual and organisational performance and this will result in more effective and efficient services to our service users.

1. Objectives

The aim of this policy is to describe the Council's commitment

- to improve the health and wellbeing of the Council's workforce;
- to contribute to the National Strategy for Mental Health and Employment by providing support to employees suffering mental ill health;
- to prevent work-related illness and injury, going further to use the workplace as an opportunity for general health improvement;
- to respond early when health problems arise – and ensure that the necessary interventions are easily and speedily available;
- to help people to better manage their conditions so that they can lead as full a life as possible;
- to ensure that appropriate rehabilitation support and workplace adaptations are available for those who have been out of the workplace because of ill health, enabling them to make their return to work as soon as possible.
- to introduce a range of well-being initiatives which contribute towards excellent attendance and employee well-being.

2. Organisational commitment

The Council has obligations under health and safety legislation to manage risks to the health and safety of employees. In addition to reducing physical risks, this means operating in a way that minimises harm to employees' mental health, for example by ensuring that the demands of jobs are acceptable and having policies and procedures in place to support individuals who experience mental ill-health at work.

The Council will put in place measures to prevent and manage risks to employee wellbeing, together with appropriate training and individual support. It will also seek to promote a culture of good mental health by incorporating these principles into line manager training and running regular initiatives to improve health issues at work.

3. Responsibilities

While this section seeks to allocate responsibilities to managers, employees and support services, it's important to emphasise that the wellbeing of employees is best promoted by all parties working together in an environment of openness, trust and cooperation.

The Council

As an employer, the Council has a legal duty to ensure the health at work of all its employees. The Council will ensure that its policies and practices reflect this duty and review them at regular intervals.

Senior Managers

Directors and Heads of Service will demonstrate leadership by active and visible participation in and promotion of wellbeing programmes.

Line managers

Line managers will put in place measures to minimise the risks to employee's health and wellbeing. They do this through active management of health risks – both physical and psychological.

Physical risks - The Council's Health and Safety Policy requires managers to assess the risks of injury associated with the work they manage, and take steps to eliminate, reduce and control these risks. Risk assessments should be reviewed annually. Guidance on risk assessment can be found in the health and safety pages of the intranet.

Psychological risks - managers must familiarise themselves with the risk assessment approach in *Stress at Work: a manager's guide*, and apply this to mitigate psychological risk in their teams. For example, managers should ensure that employees understand their role within the team and receive the necessary information and support from managers and team members to do their job. Managers must also be familiar with the Council's Equalities and Dignity at Work policies to support employees, who may be subject to bullying or harassment.

In particular, line managers must ensure that they take steps to reduce the risks to the employee's health and wellbeing by:

- ensuring that the right people are recruited to the right jobs and that a good match is obtained between individuals recruited and job descriptions/specifications;
- keeping employees in the team up to date with developments at work and how these might affect their job and workload;
- ensuring employees know who to approach with problems concerning their role and how to pursue these with senior management;
- making sure jobs are appropriately designed and that work is fairly allocated between teams;

If line managers are approached by employees with health concerns they should:

- ensure any information that an employee chooses to share with them is treated in confidence, and
- seek HR and/or OH advice on how to support the employee.

Employees

Employees are encouraged to raise concerns when their health is affecting their work with their manager or with HR. Any health-related information disclosed by an employee during discussions with managers, HR or the Occupational Health Service is treated in confidence.

Employees must take responsibility for managing their own health and wellbeing, by adopting healthy behaviours (e.g. a balanced diet, moderating alcohol consumption and quitting smoking) and informing their manager if they believe their work or their work environment is affecting their health. Employees should be fully aware of their responsibilities under the Council's policy on Alcohol and Drugs.

Employees with a Disability

The Council is committed to making all reasonable adjustments to accommodate employees with a disability. Where disabilities are identified pre-employment or if the Council becomes aware of them in the course of employment, managers and colleagues must carefully consider any reasonable adjustments, document and, if appropriate, implement them to enable employees to function optimally as soon as reasonably practicable.

Few people with disability experience unchanging conditions; the conditions resulting in their disability, their role and their workplace environment are all subject to change. Adjustments should be reviewed periodically and may need to change accordingly.

The Council expects managers of employees with disabilities to meet each disabled employee on a one-to-one basis at least annually (and more frequently if the employee requests it) to review any changes that may have taken place, and plan reasonable adjustments as necessary. If solutions cannot be agreed in this meeting (and if in any doubt), managers should seek assistance and advice from HR, the Occupational Health Service, the Council's Access Officer, and the Disability Employment Adviser.

Human Resources

Human Resources, supported by the Occupational Health Service will raise senior management well-being awareness through briefings and Business Partner meetings. Human Resources will develop and advise on policies and procedures to promote employee wellbeing, assist line managers in supporting individuals, and liaise as appropriate with the Occupational Health Service, with the object of helping employees to maintain good physical and psychological health. HR will ensure that management development includes

training in emotional intelligence and behaviours that promote employee wellbeing.

Occupational Health Service

The Occupational Health Service will provide a service designed to help employees stay in work or to return to work after experiencing health problems. This will include assessments of individuals' fitness for work following referral from line managers and Human Resources, liaising with GPs and consultants and working with individuals to help them to retain employment.

The Occupational Health Service will advise on rehabilitation plans for employees returning to work after absences. The service will maintain links with therapists able to provide the Council with fast-track physical therapy following musculoskeletal injury, and will advise when referral would be suitable. The service will support line managers in adjusting jobs and working environments to ensure successful rehabilitation and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. The Occupational Health Service will also advise employees on health promotion and healthy lifestyle programmes.

Counselling Service

If an employee identifies, or the Council learns, that the employee is mentally unwell, e.g. anxious, depressed or struggling to cope with a stressful life event, the employee will, with their agreement, be referred to the Council's counselling service. In addition to supporting individual employees, counselling service providers will alert the Council's management to issues that require addressing in the workplace, and to clusters or 'hotspots' of psychological risk, drawing on information provided in face-to-face counselling with employees, while respecting employees' confidentiality.

4. Health promotion initiatives

Through an agreed action plan, the Council will develop and run a range of health promotion initiatives designed to raise awareness of health and lifestyle issues affecting mental health and wellbeing. The Occupational Health Service and HR will have primary responsibility for leading these programmes in partnership with Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust. These programmes will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. The programmes will cover:

- general or specific health screening coupled with health advice;
- stress management;
- promoting mental wellbeing – e.g. mental health first aid training
- lifestyle behaviours, with voluntary screening (for example in relation to alcohol, drugs and smoking);
- promoting physical activity and fitness (for example promoting the existing Slice Card initiative and facilitating exercise classes – see paragraph below)

Employees will also be supported to establish clubs and groups designed to promote wellbeing, for example lunchtime walking clubs. The action plan will

outline specific initiatives and assign responsibilities, and also seek to get Council commitment to providing resources as necessary, such as facilities in which to run classes, etc.

5. Training and communications

Line managers and employees will regularly discuss individual training needs to ensure that employees have the necessary skills to adapt to ever-changing job demands. An examination of training needs will be particularly important prior to, and during, periods of organisational change.

Managers and employees are encouraged to participate in communication / feedback exercises, including employee surveys and conferences. All employees are expected to be aware of the importance of effective communication and to use the media most appropriate to the message, for example team meetings, one-to-one meetings, electronic communications and Council-wide methods. Through its commitment to achieving Investors in People accreditation the Council will ensure that structures exist to give employees regular feedback on their performance, and for them to raise concerns.

The Council will ensure that communication plans are integral to planning and implementing organisational change.

The Council will use established communications channels (e.g. Oxford Accents) and occasional ad hoc publicity to promote wellbeing messages and publicise health promotion events.

6. Occupational Health Service

A comprehensive occupational health service is available, from individual health screening to the design of return-to-work plans for those rehabilitating after a period of long-term sickness absence.

Workplace wellbeing services provided by the Occupational Health Service include:

- pre-employment screening;
- fitness-for-work assessments;
- rehabilitation plans and advising on reasonable adjustments
- immunisation for occupational disease risks;
- health surveillance;
- advising on health promotion initiatives;
- making recommendations that the Council could seek to meet reasonable medical costs (such as physiotherapy) where there is an agreed business case (i.e. with HR) that to do so would reduce sick pay and sick leave and improve services to customers.

If employees believe that their work, or some aspect of it, is putting their wellbeing at risk they should, in the first instance, speak to their line manager or HR. The discussion should cover workload and other aspects of job demands, and raise issues such as identified training needs.

A referral to the Occupational Health Service will be made if this is considered appropriate after an employee's initial discussion with his/her manager or HR. Discussions between employees and the occupational health professionals are confidential, although the Occupational Health Service will report to managers on the employee's fitness to work, and any recommended adaptations ("reasonable adjustments") to the working environment.

7. Other Support Measures

Other measures available to help employees to maintain their health and wellbeing include:

- subsidised Slice card – giving access to leisure centres and activities at reduced rates;
- a cycle-to-work salary sacrifice scheme and other measures to promote cycling to, from and at work
- special leave arrangements;
- flexible working policies;
- Alcohol & Drugs policy

8. Relationship with other policies

This employee health and wellbeing policy is complemented by other policies and procedures, such as special leave, flexible working, attendance management, stress, dignity at work, aggression at work, equalities and employee development.

9. Monitoring and Review

This health and wellbeing policy necessarily consists of a number of strands and areas of activity. It is important to ensure that each of these contributes positively to the overall wellbeing of the workforce. Each regular activity aimed at improving wellbeing, and any one-off planned health promotion initiative should be monitored for take-up, reach and effectiveness. Not all activities may result in immediate or objectively measurable health benefits and in these circumstances effectiveness may be measured in more subjective terms such as employee approval.

Responsibility for monitoring lies with the activity sponsor in conjunction with the health and safety adviser and OH Service. The Council's Health and Safety Committee will review monitoring reports.