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North East
Better Health
at Work Award

Focus Groups – June 2017

As part of the work towards the Continuing Excellence level of the Better Health at Work Awards, our Health Advocates invited colleagues to attend focus group sessions to gather feedback on experiences around mental health and musculoskeletal issues.

The sessions asked attendees to consider what more could be done in the workplace to provide support, promote self-care, aid early identification and early referral into commissioned services. The sessions gathered information on colleagues understanding of the referral process into mental health and physiotherapy services and identify any barriers for accessing support.

Employees were not specifically asked to comment on their own personal experiences, the questions asked were around observations from the workplace, understanding of processes and ideas regarding what more could be done.

Musculoskeletal Focus Groups

18 participants from across the Council took part in the musculoskeletal focus groups

General Overview:

- Positive feedback was received regarding the service provided by Body2Fit
- It was felt that there was generally minimal stigma to accessing services (e.g. Body2Fit or local NHS services) but 'fear and pride' (the descriptors used) may stop some from coming forward for support
- It was felt that there was a stigma regarding the impact on an employee's career/employment in roles where physical strength is perceived as critical. This may prevent people asking for help or leaving issues for longer before accessing support.
- It was felt that when support is accessed it tended to be reactive in nature not proactive.

Discussion points:

- Those with MSK issues might leave it too long before accessing support
- Work pressures leading to staff eating at their desks and not taking a lunch break could cause musculoskeletal issues
- A lack of DSE assessments are being undertaken/lack of awareness around DSE assessments including process and what happens afterwards
- Lack of awareness of the range of support Body2Fit can offer- misconception that it needs to be a work related MSK problem
- Colleagues are unsure about how bad something needs to be before help is accessed.
- Referral has to be signed off by the employees line manager and any equipment needed.
- Lack of consistency in office working environments - no standard desk set up/equipment - some people have standing desks, some hot desking.
- Is there a desk/chair maintenance improvement scheme? Some people have been using incorrect / second hand/ damaged equipment for some time

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Suggestions

You Suggested	We are / We will
<p>DSE Training and Risk Assessment Programme</p> <p>Increase uptake of DSE</p> <p>Review the DSE process, with a view to making improvements</p> <p>Concern regarding DSE implications of SWIS (working at dining room tables, sofas, etc. for long periods of time)</p> <p>Introduction of break prompt for VDU users</p>	<p>We will be emailing Managers with advice and information on the DSE Training and Risk Assessment Programme – when they should be carried out, how they should be conducted and by who.</p> <p>We will continue to review our DSE process to ensure it is fit for purpose and improve its visibility on the Council's Intranet</p> <p>We will be launching a Smarter Working policy later this year which will take into considering DSE implications.</p> <p>We will explore options with ICT for VDU users to have an optional break prompt where appropriate – subject to ICT security and service needs</p>
<p>BODY2FIT</p> <p>Increase awareness of physiotherapy services for non-work related injuries, repetitive injuries with regards to maintenance/prevention</p> <p>Awareness raising about Body2fit service and what is on offer- using some examples of range of support</p> <p>Possible drop in sessions - although these would need to be correctly advertised as previous attendees thought they would be receiving a physio session rather than a short assessment/ advice session. Drop in sessions targeting harder to reach groups.</p> <p>Advice on posture- possible BHAWA Champion?</p>	<p>We will promote Body2Fit Services through KYIT, Health Advocates and emails to managers, with greater emphasis on when support can be accessed</p> <p>We will arrange the distribution of posters to Council buildings to promote services</p> <p>We are looking to hold further drop in session by Body2fit in 2017/18 and will look to target harder to reach groups.</p> <p>We will look to provide further information and advice on Posture which will be circulated via our Health Advocates and KYIT</p>
<p>Workplace Assessments & the Working Environment</p> <p>Action following work place assessment from Body2fit?</p>	<p>Following a Workplace Assessment, the Council receive a report from Body2fit which is shared with the Employee and their Line Manager. Where replacement</p>

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<p>What is the desk replacement policy</p> <p>Research funding for standing desks from www.getBritainstanding.org</p>	<p>chairs or equipment are recommended for purchase, the Line Manager should liaise with facilities management to ensure the appropriate support is provided.</p> <p>If an employee has a broken desk, they should contact facilities management to arrange for the desk to be fixed or replaced. We will ensure this information is communicated to managers.</p> <p>Standing desks are purchased for staff when recommended as part of a workplace assessment. We will promote some simple solutions to encourage staff to be more active and stand more at work, and will ask staff to take part in The On Your Feet Britain Challenge on 28 April 2018 to convert 'sitting time' to 'standing time'.</p>
<p>Communications</p> <p>Introduction of information app for remote workers- Can KYIT and employee benefits/Intranet be accessed via an app for mobile?</p> <p>Possible 15 mins per week for fixed hours staff to read KYIT (also for Mental Health)</p>	<p>The Council's Communications Team are currently looking at options to update our Intranet pages, and to make it accessible to remote / manual / mobile workers outside of work. Further information will provided when available.</p> <p>We support employee's taking time out to read KYIT and to keep abreast of what is going on across the Council</p>
<p>Consider Walking Meetings</p>	<p>We are happy to support "walking meetings" where appropriate. Where there are a large number of delegates in attendance, walking meetings may not be appropriate, but delegates could stand in meeting rooms to alleviate any discomfort.</p>
<p>Activities</p> <p>Encouraging colleagues to be more active during working day</p> <p>Workforce running group/ lunchtime/ post work activity.</p>	<p>Health Walks have previously been arranged on lunchtimes and we actively encourage employees to arrange their own activities either within their teams / service areas / buildings</p> <p>We have set up a beginners running group for SBC Employees – starting 25 September at 5:30pm. We are aware of informal running groups / football teams that have been set up in some services.</p>

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Utilising sports development team more for employees	We will explore this option further and consider options for wider promotion/participation
Encourage visiting colleagues rather than email, to increase mobility/movement	We are happy to support colleagues visiting others within their buildings to increase mobility.
Possible yoga/Pilates classes	We are exploring the option of Beginner Pilates/Yoga classes for staff and will provide further information as soon as it is available

Mental Health Focus Groups

16 participants from across the Council took part in the Mental Health focus groups

General Overview:

- Negative image around Mental Health problems
- Suspicion that the confidential service isn't confidential. There is a fear it will end up on an employee record and have implications especially when under review
- Implications for career progression, impact on future opportunities if seeking support for a mental health condition.
- Generation/gender issues stopping some people from accessing help
- Perceived/experienced Fear, awkwardness & attitude towards mental health
- Seen as a sign of weakness

Discussion points:

- Individuals feeling that their issue is 'not bad enough' to access support services
- When and where services can be accessed - even though the flexi scheme would allow most colleagues to access during work time, feel uncomfortable in case colleagues find out.
- Lack of awareness regarding options for support e.g. telephone, face to face, website with self help
- Language used in promotion of services - Labelling it as a 'counselling service' puts people off. Seeing it as a chance to talk to someone confidentially or a 'pep talk / sounding board' may help to bring more people forward.
- Suspicion regarding accessing services and notification to employer
- Reliance on managers to cascade information to staff – this is reliant on whether a manager is good/bad/indifferent, & what about the managers own mental health?
- Lack of anonymity if more than 6 sessions needed - need to be agreed if more than 6.
- Staff not willing to access services even when offered
- Difficulty in getting staff away from time pressure roles to attend support sessions
- Service not able to support some colleagues with bereavement despite asking for help

Management considerations:

- Relationships with line managers and colleagues were felt to be very important both to recognise when colleagues are struggling and to offer early support.
- Engagement of individual managers in events to promote MH awareness has been mixed

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- Management style sometimes adds to anxiety- clashes of working styles
- Managements attitude to mental health can be mixed
- HR support seen as reactive, provision for proactive support not apparent
- Managers impact on camaraderie within an office environment

Smarter Working

- Impact on team dynamics- people out of the office more, relationships with colleagues lose some of the social aspect of work. Potential Isolation of staff
- Consistency across teams both in approach and consistency of delivery to members of the public
- Identification of poor mental health – reduced contact with colleagues and line manager may hinder identification of employee struggling
- Work life balance- employees working from home maybe more inclined to check emails etc. over weekend

Leave Policy

The current leave policy was discussed and attendees questioned on their awareness of the new policy. None of those attending were previously aware of the policy including those who had some management responsibility. Comments included:

- an appreciation the lack of definition of immediate family to reflect the diversity of family structures
- It was felt that there was a lack of consistency in the knowledge regarding the policy and the way it is being implemented by line managers
- A good relationship between line manager and employee is important for the leave policy to be used appropriately, i.e. understand family situation etc.
- Still seem to be urban myths around what leave is available for bereavement etc.
- Quantify the cost of inappropriate sickness when raising awareness with line managers.

You Suggested	We are / We will / We have....
<p>Insight Wellbeing Support Services</p> <p>Promote the service in a different way to encourage those who may be alienated by traditional counselling services e.g. Did you know?....Insights offer...</p> <p>Showing staff that the service is there ‘for the right reasons’ to help them not gather information against them</p> <p>Possible staff awareness raising sessions on what Insights offer- to remove barriers</p> <p>Insights link at the top of Job Bulletin</p> <p>Ensure when you search for ‘stress’ on the intranet Insights comes up</p>	<p>We will continue to promote Insight Wellbeing and look at alternative ways to increase engagement</p> <p>The Insight counselling service is completely confidential. No names are shared with the Council or any information which can identify an individual</p> <p>We will continue to promote Insight at any health promotion event in future and invite insight in to promote services.</p> <p>As the bulletin is also issued externally we are unable to accommodate this request.</p> <p>We have amended the intranet to ensure this is included in search results.</p>

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<p>Management</p> <p>Training for existing managers- Mental Health First Aid or equivalent</p> <p>Health and wellbeing as an agenda item for team meetings</p> <p>Quantify the cost of sickness when raising awareness with line managers</p> <p>Encouraging line managers to have a proactive support to offering help early</p> <p>A lack of consistency in the knowledge regarding the Leave policy</p> <p>Educate on where leave policy could have been used</p>	<p>We are exploring options for the delivery of Mental Health First Aid for Managers or an alternative training programme around Mental wellbeing.</p> <p>We have introduced Wellbeing as a discussion point on the 2017/18 appraisal document and would welcome managers having more regular discussions during 1-2-1s and team meetings</p> <p>We are unable to accurately quantify the cost of sickness absence due to a number of factors such as whether or not sickness absence is covered via additional hours or agency work. We will however continue to provide sickness absence information to managers showing the working days lost within the service to raise awareness of the impact sickness has We are also introducing a KYIT article to show all employee's the levels of sickness absence within the workplace, including the reasons for sickness and working days lost</p> <p>We will continue to encourage managers to be proactive with employee wellbeing and ensure they are aware of the support services available to employees.</p> <p>We will continue to promote the leave policy to line manager and the support it can provide to employees.</p> <p>We are contacting managers when sickness absence is reported due to bereavement / family emergency / caring responsibilities to discuss whether or not alternative options can be considered in line with the policy.</p>
<p>Communication</p> <p>Specific button on the intranet page with Health and Wellbeing info</p> <p>Intranet banners</p>	<p>We have an Employee Benefits and Support button on the Intranet front page which provides access to a range of services to support wellbeing</p> <p>We are promoting Insight and other wellbeing support via the Council's Intranet banner</p>

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<p>Detail info of services on payslip?</p> <p>Linking good mental health with the workforce culture statement to get the message out that it is important- culture environment?</p> <p>Breakfast club- allowing colleagues to come together to build supportive relationships</p> <p>Self-help section of intranet in relation to mental health to be amended to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical activity - Coaching - Mentoring - 5 ways to wellbeing - Benefits of physical activity - Sharing info on other services e.g. NHS, IAPT services so employees have a choice <p>Text messages and KYIT for smart phones Possibility of allowing staff to receive info on personal email for those who aren't office based</p>	<p>We will explore the option of promoting wellbeing services via the payslip with Xentrall Shared Services</p> <p>We will look to link our culture and behaviours in any promotional material regarding Mental Wellbeing in future. We are valued trusted and supported, We are heard. Although not specifically identified, we believe good mental health is intrinsically linked to our workforce culture and our behaviours state that we will “make time to listen to, support and involve others” and “Speak to each other with respect and understanding”.</p> <p>We have previously promoted Coffee Mornings and Time to Talk sessions and will continue to promote further sessions in future</p> <p>We will be improving the information available via the intranet for employees in 2017 which will include information on other services available</p> <p>The Council's Communications Team are currently looking at options to update our Intranet pages, and to make it accessible to remote / manual / mobile workers outside of work. Further information will provided when available.</p>
<p>Training</p> <p>Coaching and mentoring were mentioned as positive influences which although not specific support for mental health, have allowed for positive relationships to be built which allowed for early signs to anxiety or depression to be identified.</p> <p>Offer headway/mindfulness outside of working hours?</p>	<p>We will promote coaching and mentoring and highlight the positive impact they can have on an employees wellbeing.</p> <p>We will discuss with our trainers the possibility of offering Headway and Mindfulness outside of “Core” working hours.</p>