

Workforce Wellbeing & Health Strategy 2017 to 2020

Introduction

The business benefits to be gained from a healthy workforce are indisputable. There is an evident correlation between high wellbeing and engagement levels leading to optimal employee and organisational performance. Evidence¹ suggests that workplace practices and lifestyle choices can influence physical and psychological wellbeing in ways that increase productivity, commitment and attendance. Other benefits for organisations can be seen in improved retention, employee resilience and a more effective employer brand. A healthier workforce also helps local authorities meet corporate social responsibilities in terms of their public health strategic outcomes.

This document outlines Kent County Council's approach to promoting and supporting health and wellbeing in the workplace.

The Kent Context

An environment where there are increasing demands and restructures can have an impact on employees' mental and physical health. The Council's staff survey has shown that for a number of years employees feel work pressure is increasing and the level of support they get may not be keeping pace with what they require. However, the Council has a good record of recognising and rewarding high levels of performance amongst its staff.

As a result of increasing employee engagement, effective management, corporate wide health, safety and well-being initiatives alongside targeted support to managers and employees Kent County Council reduced sickness levels from more than 10 days per year per person to around 7 days. At 2017 this compares favourably with the national average for all employment sectors and very favourably with the public sector². However, it is 1 to 2 days higher than levels of absence in the private sector.

The average age of KCC's workforce, c.45 years, has not changed significantly for some years. Data shows that as the Council's employees get older they take, on average, more days off sick per year than younger staff.

KCC does not readily quantify the cost of sickness absence, which may include lost productivity, as well as the cost of cover and/or delivery of a poorer service to our customers. However, KCC lost c.84,000 days to staff absence in 2016/17.

In all, 69% of absence occurrences in KCC were very short term in nature (between 1 and 3 days in length). The top 5 reasons for absence make up 64% of overall sickness in KCC based on days lost. The table shows the number of days lost in KCC in 2016/17 for the top 5 reasons for absence and what percentage each contributes to overall sickness levels.

¹ Engage for Success, The Evidence – Wellbeing and Employee Engagement (2014)

² CIPD, Absence Management – Annual Survey Report (2016)

Top5 Reasons for Sickness Absence

Absence Reason	Days lost for short-term absence	Days lost for long-term absence	Total days lost	% of overall sickness
Musculoskeletal	5,531	13,515	19,046	23%
Mental Health	2,030	10,724	12,754	15%
Gastro-Intestinal	5,762	2,977	8,739	11%
Stress	1,863	5,575	7,438	9%
Ear, nose, throat	4,156	1,174	5,330	6%
TOTAL	19,342	33,965	53,307	64%

What are the Council's strategic health and wellbeing outcomes?

They are simple and measurable.

- 1) Improved employee engagement
- 2) Decreased sickness absence

What will be the Council's strategic principles for delivering the outcomes?

- a) KCC will focus on delivering both employee and organisational wellbeing
- b) The impact of an intervention in terms of cause and effect must be demonstrable (measurable), reviewed and evaluated
- c) Our approach will be inclusive, diverse and multigenerational
- d) Coherence, consistency and authenticity will underpin the strategy
- e) Organisational culture has to support wellbeing in the workplace
- f) Culture trumps initiatives
- g) KCC's approach will not be static (continuous improvement)
- h) A variegated and flexible approach to meet differing requirements and needs, both individual and within services
- i) Cost effective and budget sensitive
- j) Development of the relationship between employee and employer
- k) Senior leadership of the agenda

How will we deliver the strategy?

There will be a broad framework built around a central pivot of the role managers and the organisation play in employee health and wellbeing. The impact of managers is significant in that they are responsible for creating a working environment in which employees can thrive and perform effectively. Developing employee confidence, moral and trust is integral to making this strategy succeed and will have a positive impact on employee mental and physical health. Managers play an integral role in helping reduce stress, that is harmful to health, through the way work is designed and managed.

The role of managers will be augmented by addressing the main reasons for absence in the organisation as well as supporting staff in the workplace and to make suitable wellbeing choices for themselves.

Key themes of the strategy are:

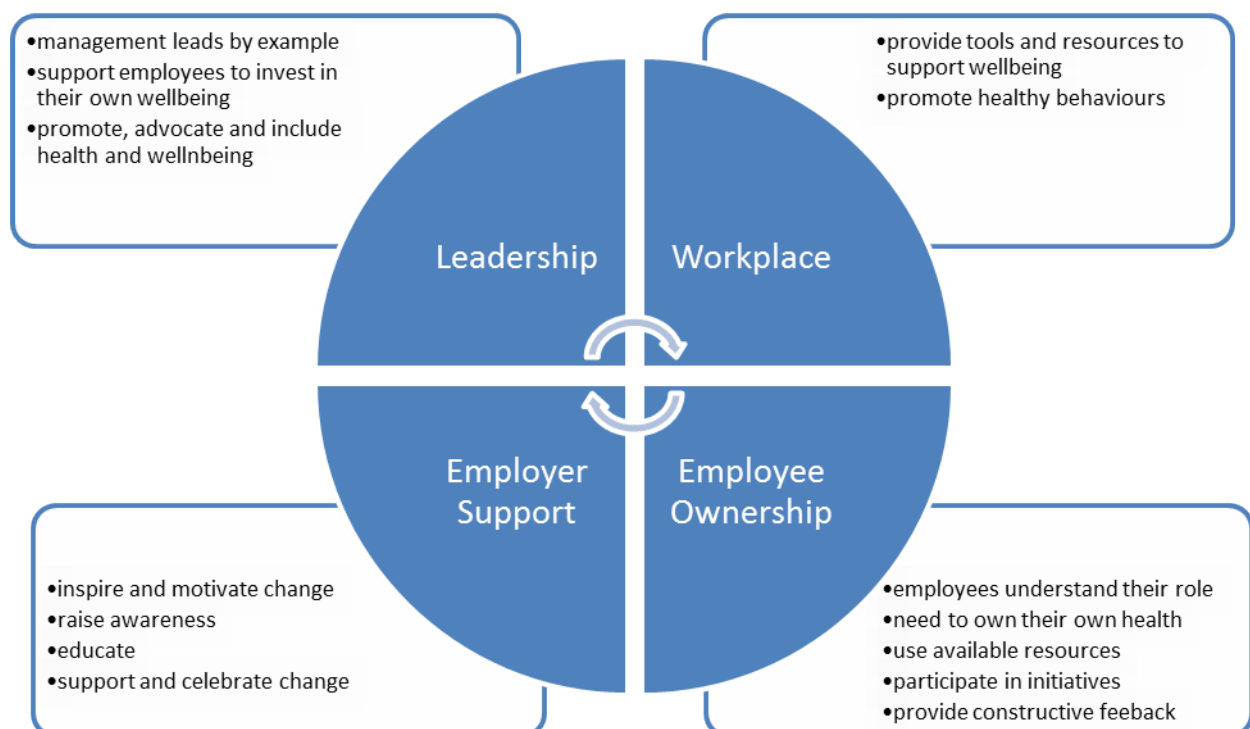
Management of absence levels are targeting top reasons for absence	Organisational Wellbeing	Employee Wellbeing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Targeted interventions to reduce levels of absence on top reasons• Targeted support for managers in areas of high absence• Education and support to help staff manage their conditions and improve their morale and confidence at work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Values based working environment and management style• Open communication and dialogue to build employee confidence and morale• Management deliver on their roles and responsibilities• Team working and co-operation• Clarity and unity of purpose• Flexibility, discretion and support for reasonable risk taking• Work life balance• Ability to influence workload and work pace• Fairly compensated in terms of salary and benefits• Support career management• Training and development• Employment policies that support wellbeing (Worksmart, carers)• Suitably designed jobs and ways of working (e.g. managed caseloads)• Suitable working environment, including adjustments• Inclusive employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthy body and healthy choices (diet, exercise, leisure)• Developing an attitude that enables self-confidence, self-respect and resilience• Sense of purpose, fulfilment and meaning• Active mind, open to new experiences• Supportive network of relationships

How will this be achieved?

The three themes will play a significant role in delivering the strategic outcomes. They will weave into each aspect of the framework for delivery which is focused on prevention, intervention and continuing support.

- Prevention: A range of approaches to help create a working environment that avoids placing unnecessary pressure on people and/or adversely affecting their health (e.g. providing correct protective equipment). It also aims to minimise the number of factors that could trigger high levels of stress, mental health problems or other related illnesses (i.e. organisational policies supporting flexible working, training and development, job design etc. and mental health promotion activities). Also, provides an educative input to advise and support people about making the right wellbeing choices for themselves and providing a range of options to support this. Prevention can also be achieved through promoting a positive workplace climate that helps develop morale, employee confidence and trust.
- Intervention: Providing support when there are signs of potential illness or symptoms that can lead to ill health as early as possible to enable management to support the employee as best as the employer can.
- Continuing Support: A range of services and initiatives for managing, supporting and retaining staff with existing illnesses.

In order to make a success of delivering this framework there are four key components of the employer/employee contract which can influence the level of engagement with and success of the strategy. The interconnected nature of effective leadership, employer support in terms of raising awareness and informing, opportunities provided by the workplace and ownership by the employee of their own health and wellbeing need to be harnessed to make a success of the strategy. The role each plays can be seen in the following diagram.



How will we measure success?

Key Performance Indicators (over a 3 year period)

Understanding how the strategy is progressing can initially be determined by looking at the primary measures that will show how the strategic outcomes are progressing. However, the interconnectivity of a range of organisational strategies with this one means that there are certain complementary indicators that help provide a fuller picture of the impact the health and wellbeing strategy has.

Primary measures

Reduced sickness levels (trends, short and long term)

Reduction in top 5 sickness levels

EVP – better psychological contract and Perceived organisational support scores, reduced workplace tension and job pressure scores

Complementary measures

TCP – continuing change in profile in terms of inclusiveness and magnitude

Employee retention

Customer experience

Improvements in services productivity KPIs

Reduction in time lost due to accidents

Staff Care Services – reduction in type of referrals, change in referral patterns (e.g. more early referrals), proactive interventions, outcomes

Reduction in ill health capability cases

Ill health capability cases – reduction in length of time of management of cases

Reduction in turnover in services with high absence/turnover figures (over a period of time)

Interventions – footfall (e.g. kiosk)

New Joiners – engagement in the first year

Key links

- Health & Safety Plan
- Public Health Strategy
- Leadership and Management Strategy
- Kent Manager
- Kent Healthy Business Awards
- Absence Management Review
- Performance Management Review
- Employment Deal
- EVP Outcomes
- Staff Care Services
- Internal Communications