

Best wellbeing, Engagement or flexible working initiative

In late 2017 the Council received the results of its staff survey which highlighted employee wellbeing as an area of concern. Whilst the Survey brought this challenge to the forefront of our minds it was, in fact, an issue we were acutely aware of as a HR Service with sickness levels considerably above the sector average and, mental health related absence in particular on the rise.

We've been working to drive improvements in wellbeing for a number of years. Reviewing the survey comments however told us we needed to do more and evolve our approach to wellbeing. Whilst the work we'd done to date had some impact, it was clear that if we were to really affect a change at scale we needed a much broader approach to creating a culture of wellbeing across the organisation, driven from the top, both through direct activities and woven through our approach to people management.

There was no dedicated budget for this work and, whilst we made use of some limited HR funds, the work has only been possible through the passion and dedication of those involved which included HR staff as well as a Health and Wellbeing Steering Group including senior managers from across the Council and Trade Union colleagues.

Looking back over 2018, it's remarkable what we've achieved - This is by no means everything!

Being Our Best Selves - An Employee Health and Wellbeing Strategy

We spend time engaging with a cross section of the organisation, as well as with Elected Members, to develop our Strategy for employee wellbeing. The Strategy was agreed in September and set out a truly overarching vision for wellbeing as an organisational drive to support staff to 'Be their best selves' - The Strategy was important, not only in setting out our vision and objectives for wellbeing, but also in describing how this is a key enabler to overall organisational performance and delivery. One of the key facets here is how, by focusing on employee wellbeing we are truly 'walking the talk' as an organisation in the context of our work with health and social care partners across the City to drive the message that good work is good for health across the City more broadly.

We asked Manchester-based wellbeing specialists Robertson-Cooper to review our Strategy and they were hugely positive about the approach: '*The MCC documentation exceeds the level and breadth of thinking we review for most clients*'. You can read the Strategy [here](#)

Our Ways of Working

Our Ways of Working (OWOW) is a critical facet of our approach to wellbeing. It supports the 'High Quality Working Life' strand of our Strategy. OWOW is not a project but rather a connection of actions aimed at creating a modern, flexible working culture. This work is led collectively by HR, ICT and Estates but is driven from the top of the organisation. Part of OWOW has involved a programme of estates modernisation, the roll-out of flexible ICT solutions and a review of our flexible working policies. However, our approach recognises that, whilst these are enablers, we can

only deliver on our ambition through focused work with Services; understanding the essential service requirements and the expectations and aspirations of staff to drive flexibility, which will be different in every Service. Some of the work to-date includes:

- Policy Research and Intelligence - adopted flexible approach including the majority of staff working away from the office 1 day per week, hot-desking. In the recent staff survey PRI scored in the top 5 across the Council for how staff feel about their wellbeing
- ICT - adopted flexible approach to work with staff working away from the office and using technology to support this (e.g. dialling in or video calling into meeting), hot-desking. Maximising office space by relocating pods and re-purposing unused facilities such as the old printer hub
- Legal - piloting new working arrangements including a bespoke flex scheme developed in consultation with staff. This has already had a direct impact on employee engagement within the wellbeing area as seen in the recent staff survey, with a 4% improvement here.
- Estates - review of work space, adopting new flexible working arrangements

OWOW is about all staff across the organisation and we're now working with front-line services like our parks department and customer services to help them progress their version of OWOW.

Our plan here has been externally validated by Timewise who are experts in this area and we're now an accredited 'Timewise Council' You can read more [here](#)

Leadership Buy-In

Leadership buy-in is critical to driving the wellbeing agenda. As already mentioned we have a committed Steering Group. We've also held focus groups with our top 100 senior leaders to support them in thinking about their own wellbeing and focused on this theme at our annual leadership summit, which involves the organisation's top 400 managers.

Two of the most powerful things we've done to maximise leadership buy-in have been:

- A session for senior leaders led by Prof. Sir Cary Cooper outlining the importance of wellbeing to organisational effectiveness.
- A session on flexibility where each leader was asked to make a personal and service commitment to flexibility. - **Evidence A**

A Focus on Mental Health

Recognising that mental health affects one in four people and that it is, by far, the biggest cause of sickness absence to the Council we have worked hard to strengthen our offer of support to staff here. The launch of our EAP in 2017 was a key component of this work. However, this could only really act to support those in times of need and not to help create a more supportive and open culture where staff felt able to talk about their mental health and where we proactively sought to support people before times of crisis. In May we launched a whole tranche of support for staff in this area to coincide with mental health awareness week. This included a range of bite-sized

resilience training sessions for all staff provided by Mind and a push on our new compulsory mental health awareness training for managers. However, the most impactful part of this work was the Council's participation in the North West launch of the 'This is Me' campaign, with a number of videos produced and shared showing colleagues talking openly and honestly about their personal mental health challenges, over a 1,000 green ribbons distributed across the Council and the Town Hall illuminated green as a sign of support . This included contributions from one of our Directors and the Trade Union Branch Secretary. The Council is now part of the steering group driving 'This is Me' across sectors regionally.

We've very much kept the focus on mental health since May, with more training and more videos and more conversations. In November we worked with of our unions to to host four performances of a specially commissioned play aimed at front-line staff to help open up the conversation on mental wellbeing. **Evidence B & C**

Impact so far

We need to be relentless if we're to deliver on the ambition of our wellbeing strategy, but we're already seeing some wins. - Our wellbeing score in our October 2018 survey saw a 2% rise from last year with a range of positive comments, **Evidence D.**

More managers are providing effective support to staff who percentage absent, the percentage of return to work interviews completed has risen by 10%.

And more staff are making use of the support available, our EAP utilisation rate of 12% is described as one of the highest seen by the provider.

More to Do

As noted, this is by no means all we've done. We could talk about our recognition as a Disability Confident employer or raising awareness of dementia, with over 100 staff trained as Dementia Friends, but there aren't enough words...

We recognise that there's much more to do and our plan for 2019 is already underway!