Mental Wellbeing at Work Policy and Procedure

1.0 Introduction

The Council is committed to creating a safe and healthy working environment that promotes the health and wellbeing of its employees. It is committed to working with employees, employee representatives and trade unions to develop a culture and environment where employees are healthy, motivated and focussed. This will have a positive impact on providing the best possible services for our residents.

The aim of this policy is to prevent and address mental health issues among our employees, creating a supportive environment and a healthy and happy workplace where everyone is treated fairly.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all employees of South Lakeland District Council.

3.0 Principles

Wellbeing at work embodies a number of principles:

- Pleasant working environments will be created collaboratively with the involvement of managers, employees and trade unions
- The wellbeing of our employees is important and issues will be treated seriously, supportively and proactively
- Mental ill health is detrimental to a person, impacting on happiness, productivity and collaboration, but with the right support they can thrive at work and make a valuable contribution

Aims of the policy:

- Improve mental health awareness and remove the stigma
- Support employees who are experiencing mental ill health
- Create a safe and healthy working environment where employees feel able to talk openly about their mental health and not fear discrimination, bullying or harassment
- Improve physical and emotional wellbeing
- Build resilience
- Encourage and support employees to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Tackle the causes of work related mental ill health

4.0 Links to the law

Employers have a legal responsibility to protect both the physical and mental health of their employees. The main pieces of legislation are the Equality Act 2010, which places a requirement on employers to consider making reasonable adjustments that will allow employees with a mental health condition that is covered by the definition of a disability in the Act to carry out their work, and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which places a duty on employers to create a safe working environment, by assessing risks and taking steps to effectively manage and control them.

The Equality Act states that "a person is disabled if they have 'a physical or mental impairment' which has 'a substantial and long-term adverse effect' on their 'ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'."

Associated policies:

- Attendance Management
- Flexible Working/Flexible Retirement
- Working Arrangements and Flexi Time Policy
- Special leave
- Maternity Leave/Paternity Leave/Maternity Support Leave/Parental Leave/Shared Parental Leave
- Dignity at Work
- Grievance

5.0 What we mean by mental health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Anyone can suffer from a period of mental ill health, which covers a range of feelings and conditions, from 'feeling down' to anxiety or depression, to conditions such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

Mental ill health can be caused by a number of factors including bereavement or a physical illness; but work, while generally being a positive influence on mental health, can also have a negative impact.

Please refer to Section 4.0 above for the definition provided by the Equality Act 2010 of a disability.

Research has found that stress is the most common cause of long term absence in public sector organisations, with mental ill health in general being reported as a top cause of absence (CIPD May 2018). ACAS (2019) reports that the estimated cost of mental ill health to UK employers each year is between £33 billion and £42 billion.

6.0 Benefits to supporting mental health in the workplace

Having a healthy workforce with good mental health results in teams and employees who are more likely to perform well, have good attendance levels and are engaged in their work. The benefits are:

- A healthier, happier workforce
- Motivated employees with increased morale
- Collaborative team working
- Employee retention and reduced employee turnover
- Reduced sickness absence
- Reduced presenteeism (where employees attend work when they are unwell)
- Good employee/management relations
- Increased productivity

This policy strongly links to a number of support measures that are already in place to actively support and promote the health and wellbeing of our employees:

- Return to work meetings
- Trigger mechanisms to review attendance
- Mental health training
- Leave for a range of personal circumstances
- Flexible working
- Family friendly provisions
- Employee Assistance Programme – providing counselling and a wide range of other services
- Occupational Health
- Risk assessments
- HR support

7.0 Positive mental health at work

The diagram below shows how the council will seek to achieve positive mental health in the workplace:

Employers are visibly committed to positive mental health

Managers are informed and open to conversations with their staff

Individuals are self-aware and ask for help when needed

(Acas framework for positive mental health at work)

We will provide training, guidance and support to managers and teams so they have the necessary skills, knowledge and ability to support employees to improve their mental health and wellbeing. We will also ensure that through a variety of means we provide information, support and training to our employees to increase their awareness of the importance of caring for their own mental health and wellbeing and that of others.

7.1 How we will embed positive mental health attitudes

- Encourage a culture where mental health is not stigmatised and employees feel able to talk about mental health concerns

- Training sessions for employees and line managers
- Promotion of this policy
- By listening to feedback from employees through engagement surveys and exit interviews
- Analysis of sickness absence data to devise targeted support strategies
- Be aware of best practice

Staff who are able to talk openly about their mental health without fear of judgement or discrimination are more likely to:

- **Disclose existing mental health conditions**, making it easier to identify signs of mental distress should they experience mental ill health again in the future
- Be honest about their own mental health and feel able to **seek help at an early stage if their mental health begins to deteriorate**
- **Stop trying to hide their mental ill health**, which can cause additional stress and cause further problems
- **Support colleagues** experiencing mental ill health

8.0 Management of mental wellbeing in the workplace

Managers are encouraged to proactively identify any mental health issues in their team and to reach out to those who they are concerned about, with a view to identifying solutions in a collaborative and respectful way. Employees are not obliged to share information with their line managers and if an employee feels uncomfortable or prefers not to discuss their mental health they will be signposted to other forms of support as described in this policy.

8.1 Practical steps to managing mental ill health in the workplace

Where individuals are experiencing mental ill health in the workplace they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their line manager. This policy makes a commitment to dealing with mental health issues in the same way as physical ill health, by using open dialogue and a supportive approach to help employees continue with their work. It is acknowledged that some employees may not wish to discuss their health with their line manager and should this be the case they are encouraged to approach the Human Resources team for support.

Common signs that an employee may be experiencing mental ill health include:

- Changes in behaviour or mood or how they interact with colleagues
- Changes in work output, motivation levels and focus
- Struggling to make decisions, get organised and find solutions to problems
- Appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn and losing interest in activities and tasks they previously enjoyed
- Changes in eating habits and appetite
- Increased smoking and drinking

If line managers are concerned, or concerns have been raised by a colleague, that all or some of the above symptoms are being displayed they will have a discussion with the employee to discuss what they have noticed and try to identify ways to provide support. This will take place by means of informal discussion. Support measures may include:

- Talking to the individual concerned and listening
- Encouraging the person to speak to a trusted colleague
- Referral to occupational health

- Referral to the employee assistance programme
- Encouraging the employee to make an appointment with their GP
- Encouraging the employee to make contact with support services such as Mind or the Samaritans
- Consideration of any workplace adjustments
- The development or review of a Wellness Action Plan (see section 8.2)

Guidance for holding a meeting to discuss mental health is provided at Appendix 1.

Where an employee is absent due to mental ill health their absence will be managed in accordance with the Attendance Management Policy, acknowledging that regular contact and the early involvement of the occupational health service is critical.

Return to work meetings are also critical and will ideally take place on the first day back at work or before the return to work if preferred. Guidance for approaching a conversation following an absence is provided at Appendix 2.

8.2 Wellness Action Plans (WAP)

Wellness action plans (WAP) are tools to proactively help employees to manage their mental health at work, and their use is encouraged. The aim is to produce a personalised plan to help identify what keeps an employee well, what causes ill health and what support would be useful to boost wellbeing. They are suitable for use with all employees, whether they have suffered with mental ill health or not. It is expected that all employees will be given the opportunity to complete a WAP. They can cover:

- Approaches the employee can adopt to support their mental wellbeing
- Early warning signs of poor mental health to look out for
- Any workplace triggers for poor mental health or stress
- Potential impact of poor mental health on performance, if any
- What support employees need from their manager
- Actions and positive steps you will both take if an employee is experiencing stress or poor mental health
- An agreed time to review the WAP and any support measures which are in place
- Anything else that the employee feels would be useful in supporting their mental health

A template is available at Appendix 3.

The following section provides a number of options for managers and employees to consider to help employees stay well at work as part of a Wellness Action Plan:

- More breaks on a flexible basis
- Considering how to incorporate walking meetings or how to access fresh air
- Phased return to work
- Considering how to incorporate creativeness and innovation
- Flexibility to change usual start and finish times
- Allowing changes to working hours on a permanent or temporary basis
- Review of work at regular one to one meetings
- Reassigning duties if required
- Providing a quiet space to work for some or all of a day, such as in an office, meeting room or at home
- Allowing extra time to achieve work deadlines or performance objectives
- Allowing certain personal phonecalls to be made at certain times of the day
- Assigning a mentor or buddy

- Increasing the frequency of one to one meetings to consider work priorities, etc

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and it will not be possible to implement all of the adjustments listed. Each case will be considered on an individual basis.

The WAP is not intended to be a medical assessment and it may not be possible to implement all of the agreed actions all of the time. The WAP does not remove the responsibility of employees to inform their manager if they are feeling unwell.

9.0 Management of stress in the workplace

Stress is defined as the 'adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'. Most employees benefit from a certain amount of pressure in their work; it can keep them motivated and give a sense of ambition. However, when there is too much pressure placed on them, they can become overloaded. Stress can affect the health of staff, reduce their productivity and lead to performance issues.

It is acknowledged that factors at work may adversely affect mental health and wellbeing, causing stress, and it is our intention to ensure that they are recognised and addressed. These factors can include:

- Lack of appreciation
- Unsatisfactory job or workload
- Poor relationships with colleagues or managers
- Poorly defined job roles and responsibilities
- Lack of control over work
- Unhealthy work-life balance
- Organisational change and/or job insecurity
- Lack of variety in work
- Lack of career progression opportunities

Stress is not an illness, but the psychological impact can lead to conditions such as anxiety and depression. Stress, anxiety and depression can also increase the risk of conditions like heart disease, back pain, gastrointestinal illnesses or skin conditions.

Signs of stress can include:

- Taking more time off work than usual with unrelated absence reasons
- Arriving for work later
- Being more twitchy or nervous
- Mood swings
- Being withdrawn
- Loss of motivation, commitment and confidence
- Increased emotional reactions – being more tearful, sensitive or aggressive

In order to address work related stress, risk assessments will be carried out by managers on a regular basis, with reviews taking place at least once a year. Whole team risk assessments will identify risks that have the potential to negatively impact on any team member and control measures will be identified.

9.1 Practical steps to managing stress – how line managers will deal with individual cases of stress relating to work

Where individual employees are experiencing work related stress they are encouraged to speak to their line manager or Human Resources as soon as possible. Line managers will take a number of steps should they be approached by an employee, or where they are concerned that an employee is displaying symptoms of stress:

- Open up a discussion to identify the causes of the stress and identify any initial support measures
- Referral, on the first day of absence where possible, to the Active Care service, which is part of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) if the employee is absent from work. This needs to happen as soon as possible and no later than two weeks from the start date of the absence. This involves the completion of a referral form with consent from the employee – see Appendix 4
- Where an employee has not been absent or has returned to work, a conversation should be held to discuss the causes of the stress:
    - Use the Talking Toolkit to identify the causes and identify solutions - Appendix 5
    - Produce a Wellness Action Plan – Appendix 3
    - Involve HR if it would be beneficial to all concerned
    - Refer to the Employee Assistance Programme for counselling if the employee has not been referred using the Active Care service – by referral form with consent from the employee – see Appendix 6

The diagram below shows the steps that can be taken by line managers to support employees:
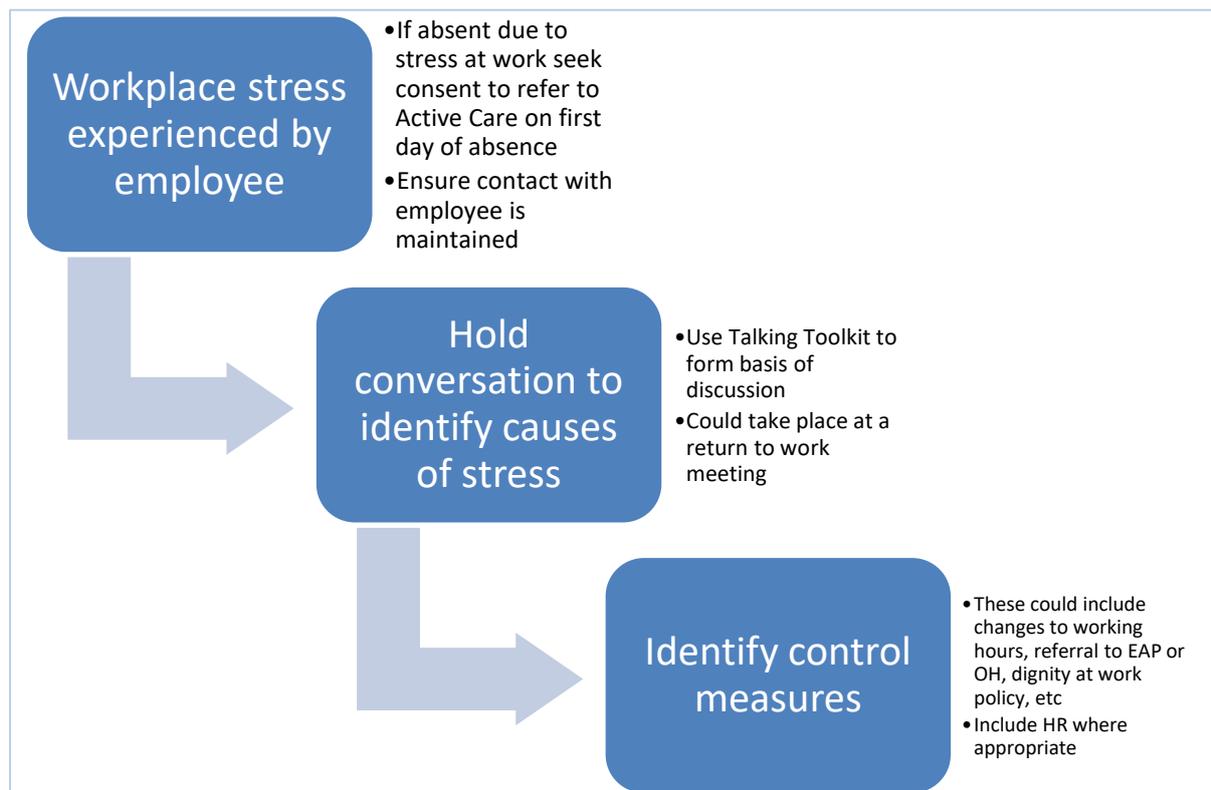
9.2 Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

The EAP is a service that is available for all employees that is completely free, confidential and available 24 per day, 365 days per year. Services it provides include formal counselling,

either face to face or over the telephone, online counselling, online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy), support in relation to personal legal information, financial support, family issues including childcare and eldercare, housing concerns, bereavement or loss, relationships and marital changes. There is also a health and wellbeing portal that includes interactive health assessments, fitness and lifestyle coaching, personal coaching tools, self-help programmes, work life assistance, mini health checks, home lift support, health calendar and much more.

Employees can access the telephone and online services directly. Counselling can be accessed without the need to involve or seek permission from anyone and is completely confidential. There is also a management referral process for counselling for employees and an Active Care referral process for those employees who are unable to attend work due to stress, whether work related or personal.

Further information about the employee assistance programme, along with contact information, is available at Appendix 7.

10.0 Further resources

There is a SLDC Employee Wellbeing Sharepoint page with many resources available. Other sources of information include:

- **Access to work** - **www.gov.uk/access-to-work** - can provide advice and an assessment of workplace needs for individuals, with disabilities or long-term health conditions, who are already in work or about to start. Grants may also be available to help cover the cost of workplace adaptations.

- **Business in the Community** - **www.bitc.org.uk** - is a network that provides toolkits on Mental Health, Suicide prevention and Suicide postvention to help employers support the mental health and wellbeing of employees.

- **Mind** - **www.mind.org.uk** - is a leading mental health charity in England and Wales. It provides information and support on how to improve mental health.

- **Mindful Employer** - **www.mindfulemployer.net** - is a UK-wide, NHS initiative. It is aimed at increasing awareness of mental health at work and providing support for businesses when recruiting and retaining staff.

- **NHS choices** - **www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth** - has a website that offers information and practical advice for anyone experiencing mental ill health.

- **Remploy** - **www.remploy.co.uk** - offers a free and confidential Workplace Mental Health Support Service for anyone absent from work or finding work difficult because of a mental health condition. It aims to help people remain in, or return to, their role.

- **Rethink Mental Illness** - **www.rethink.org** - is a voluntary sector provider of mental health services offering support groups, advice and information on mental health and problems.

11.0 Review of the policy

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis in the light of operating experience and/or changes in legislation.

12.0 Appendices

Appendix 1   Tips for having a conversation about mental health

Appendix 2   Tips for what to discuss following an absence relating to mental health

Appendix 3   Wellness Action Plan (WAP) template

Appendix 4   Active Care Service referral form

Appendix 5   HSE Talking Toolkit

Appendix 6   EAP Referral Form

Appendix 7   EAP leaflet