

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

WELL-BEING MATTERS

1: Introduction and Scope

In its widest sense 'Well-being' refers to the overall quality of life experienced by a person in relation to a broad range of factors including physical health; psychological well-being; social well-being; financial well-being; family relationships; friendships; work and leisure. The individual's sense of well-being may be affected by any one or a combination of these factors and this is likely to have an impact upon the individuals work.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) has a commitment to approach the design of the organisation in such a way that will enhance well-being through work and recognises that there may be times when the individual will need support with factors outside the work environment that are having an impact upon their sense of well-being.

This policy describes the commitment MBC has to employee well-being, the responsibilities of managers and others for maintaining psychological health, health promotion initiatives, communicating and training on health issues, the range of support available for the maintenance of well-being, and our commitment to handling individual issues.

MBC recognises that wellbeing and performance are linked. Improving employees' ability to handle pressure and to balance work and home life will ultimately lead to improved individual and organisational performance. Whilst MBC can only directly influence what happens in the work place it recognises that individuals may need support for external factors such as bereavement, domestic abuse or other relationship difficulties, financial problems, etc and this policy will apply to all these situations.

2. Organisational commitment

MBC has legal obligations under health and safety legislation to manage risks to the health and safety of employees. In addition to reducing safety risks, this means operating the business in a way that minimises harm to employees' mental health, for example by ensuring that the demands of jobs are not unacceptable and having policies and procedures in place to support individuals experiencing mental ill health at work.

MBC 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 foster a positive approach to mental well-being by incorporating these principles into line manager training and running regular initiatives to raise awareness of mental health issues at work.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Employer

MBC, as the employer, has a legal duty of care to employees to ensure health at work, as set out in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. MBC are committed to ensuring that its policies and practices reflect this duty and will review the operation of these documents at regular intervals.

3.2 Line managers

Line managers will put in place measures to minimise the risks to employee wellbeing, particularly from negative pressure at work. Managers must make sure that they complete the IVY module on stress management and use information given there to mitigate psychological risks in their teams. Managers must also familiarise themselves with the organisation's policy on Protecting the Dignity of People at Work in order to support staff, for example on harassment issues

Managers will ensure that:

- the right people are recruited to the right jobs and that a good match is obtained between individuals recruited and job descriptions/specifications and that they are thoroughly inducted;
- employees understand their role within the team by setting clear objectives, ensuring that employees know how they are performing and undertaking formal appraisals at the appropriate time.
- employees in the team are kept up to date with developments at work and how these might affect their job and workload;
- employees know who to approach with problems concerning their role and how to pursue issues with senior management;
- jobs are designed fairly and that work is allocated appropriately between teams, people are trained to do the work; and
- work stations are regularly assessed to ensure that they are appropriate and fit for purpose especially during pregnancy or when any other health issues occur.

3.3 Human resources

The HR department will continue to develop and review organisation-wide policies and procedures to protect the wellbeing of employees, assist line managers in supporting individuals, and liaise, as appropriate, with occupational health and other medical professionals, with the object of helping employees to maintain good health.

3.4 Occupational health

MBC have an occupational health service, Health Management, who provide a comprehensive service designed to help employees stay in work, or to return to work, after experiencing health problems. This will include preparing medical

assessments of individuals' fitness for work following referrals from line managers and the HR department, liaising with GPs and working with individuals to help them to retain employment.

Health Management provide an occupational health advisor (OHA) on Council premises at Maidstone House. The OHA will play a critical part in developing rehabilitation plans for employees returning to work after absences related to ill health, including mental ill health. Occupational health professionals, in conjunction with HR, will also design and implement health promotion and lifestyle behaviour management programmes, including initiatives on managing pressure and ongoing health conditions at work. Health Management also provide employees with access to a website called Health Matters which gives useful guides and articles on various health issues aiming at prevention of poor health. This can be accessed from the front page of the intranet.

Line managers can contact the MBC's occupational health service by telephone on 0845 504 1036 or e-mail at team6@healthmanltd.com

A referral to the occupational health team will be made if this is considered appropriate after an employee's initial discussion with his/her manager or the HR department. Discussions between employees and the occupational health professionals are confidential, although the occupational health team is likely to provide a report on the employee's fitness to work, and any recommended adaptations to the working environment, to the HR department.

3.5 Employee assistance programme provider

The provider of external employee assistance services is Right Core Care. They provide a telephone service 24 hours a day and 7 days per week on 0800 116 387 to allow employees to discuss issues of concern with a professional. The service gives confidential advice on financial, legal and emotional issues and will also arrange face to face counselling for employees who would benefit from it. Any employee who is having difficulty managing their finances can obtain completely confidential debt counselling through this service. They will alert the management to clusters or 'hotspots' of psychological risk in the organisation, drawing on anonymised data provided by calls to its 24-hour helpline and information from face-to-face counselling with employees.

3.6 Employees

Employees are responsible for managing their own health and wellbeing, by adopting good health behaviours (for example in relation to diet, alcohol consumption and smoking) and informing the employer if they believe work or the work environment poses a risk to their health. Any health-related information disclosed by an employee during discussions with managers, the HR department or the occupational health service is treated in confidence.

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 the HR department. The discussion may cover workload and other aspects of job demands,

and raise issues such as identified training needs. If employees are concerned about other issues which they do not feel have been addressed the Council has a Grievance Procedure so that matters may be dealt with formally. If an employee believes that there are serious matters to be raised but wishes to remain anonymous they may use the Whistleblowing Policy. This can be found on the intranet

Employees are also encouraged to talk about issues outside the work place that may have an impact on their ability to perform to the required standards. The Council has policies in place that may be able to support individuals in a range of circumstances. Some of the more extreme situations that may occur and the appropriate range of support are set out below, but even apparently minor issues may need support where it is affecting the individual at work.

3.6(i): **Domestic Abuse**

MBC takes the issue of domestic abuse extremely seriously and wants to support the eradication of it in society. MBC is, therefore, committed to supporting any employee who is experiencing domestic abuse which is defined as any incident of abuse between adults who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members. The support applies equally to men and women and covers psychological, emotional and financial abuse in addition to physical abuse.

In order to support employees who experience domestic abuse, MBC will:

Nominate an appointed person in the workplace to act as a confidential first point of contact for those experiencing domestic abuse (Kate Turner in Housing on extension 2658);

Give access to counselling through the employee assistance programme (see earlier section at 3.5)

Raise workplace awareness of domestic abuse issues through a programme of regular information initiatives

Identify employees experiencing difficulties as a result of domestic abuse by fostering an open management culture that enables team members to disclose sensitive issues

Ensure that the safety of all employees in the team is protected; and

Enable the affected employee to remain productive and at work during a difficult period in his/her domestic life, for example by using MBC's special leave policy

Signpost external sources of help and support for employees and managers:

Respect (www.respect.uk.net or 0845 122 8609) which provides practical information and advice on domestic abuse for perpetrators, the abused, health and social care professionals and family and friends; and

The National Domestic Violence Helpline (www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk or 0808 2000 247) which provides advice for those experiencing domestic abuse

Those employees who may be perpetrators of domestic abuse will also have access to counselling through the employee assistance programme (Right Core Care – para.3.5 refers)

3.6(ii): Bereavement

MBC recognise that this is a difficult time and people have different ways of coping with bereavement which needs to be respected.

Directors, subject to the agreement of the Head of Human Resources, are authorised to grant up to a maximum of seven days paid compassionate leave in appropriate circumstances such as the death of a member of the immediate family e.g. mother, father, sister or brother, and other relevant cases.

Directors are also authorised, subject to the agreement of the Head of Human Resources, to grant unpaid leave, or to transfer annual leave entitlement between leave years, if this will materially assist

3.6(iii): Financial Difficulties

From time to time people may find it difficult to cope financially and MBC would advise all employees to take advice at the earliest possible opportunity. Our Employee Assistance Programme (3.5 refers) offers financial advice as does the Citizens' Advice Bureau, which is available in the Maidstone Gateway to all employees or contact can be made with the National Debtline at www.nationaldebtline.co.uk or 0808 808 4000.

In addition, Kent now has its own Credit Union which can provide loans at more competitive rates than commercial banks and to those who may have difficulty obtaining finance elsewhere. Kent Savers can be contacted on 0300 456 9990 and are open 8 to 8 Monday to Friday and 9 to 5 on Saturdays.

Unfortunately, in certain circumstances an employee may find themselves in the position that they have no option but to declare themselves bankrupt. Employees should notify HR if they are in this position as their work may need to be reviewed if, for example, there could be any conflict of interest with their work at the Council and their creditor.

4: Relationship Problems

From time to time employees may experience problems with relationships both at work and at home. Problems at work should be discussed, in the first instance, with their Line manager or HR who will work to try to resolve the issues. For more general advice or for problems with personal relationships, employees should contact the Employee Assistance Programme (see para.3.5). For relationship difficulties at work

employees may also wish to refer to the grievance procedure which is available on the intranet.

5. Health promotion initiatives

MBC will develop and run a range of health promotion initiatives designed to raise awareness of health and lifestyle issues affecting mental health and wellbeing. Occupational health professionals and the HR department will have primary responsibility for leading these programmes, but line managers and employees will be expected to participate. These programmes will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. Currently all MBC staff are entitled to reduced membership fees for the leisure centre at Mote Park.

HR have also organised a Cycle to Work scheme where staff can purchase a bike by giving up part of their salary. Because the deduction is made from the gross amount, tax and national insurance contributions are reduced, making this a huge saving for staff.

The programmes will cover:

- stress management;
- disability awareness;
- bullying and harassment;
- lifestyle behaviours (for example in relation to alcohol, drugs and smoking);
- physical activity and fitness.

Employees will also be encouraged to establish clubs and groups designed to foster wellbeing, for example lunchtime walking clubs.

6: 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 stress audits, staff surveys and staff forums. 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 organisation-wide methods. MBC will ensure that structures exist to give employees regular feedback on their performance, and for them to raise concerns.

MBC will consider special communication media during periods of organisational change.

Other measures available to support employees in maintaining health and wellbeing include [procedures for reporting and handling inappropriate behaviour \(for example harassment\)](#);

- a stress management/handling pressure programme;
- [special leave](#) arrangements;
- [parental and dependant carer policy](#)
- [maternity support leave](#)
- [Flexi time policy](#)
- [Work/life balance policy](#) and [home and mobile working policy](#)
- [Assistance with travel policy](#)
- [support for workers with disabilities](#); and
- the Council's [grievance policy](#).
- Availability of Citizens Advice Bureau in the Gateway for MBC employees
- Annual 'flu jabs

7: Monitoring

The success of this policy will be monitored through work force statistics such as sickness absence monitoring and the volume of grievance and whistle-blowing cases. In particular the sickness absence monitoring will examine the level of sickness absence but also the reasons causing the sickness absence.

Statistics and reports are provided by the agencies which support the Council on these matters, particularly from the Employee Assistance Programme and Occupational Health. These reports are anonymous to preserve employee confidentiality but will give a general indication of the 'health' of the organisation.

The Council will conduct regular surveys for staff satisfaction and stress and these will inform the Councils approach in staffing matters. Exit interviews are carried out and where specific work related factors are discussed these will be fed back to management with the employees permission.

Regular work force reports are presented to Corporate Management Team which will sign post many of the areas covered in this document.

8: Law relating to this document

Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (SI 1999/3242)

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to make arrangements to ensure the health and safety of their employees by, for example, performing risk assessments, providing employees with information and training, assessing employees' capabilities and promoting employee wellbeing through effective health surveillance programmes.