

# **Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

## **Human Resources Committee**

## **Item**

### **Workforce Wellbeing Strategy Review**

**13 July 2010**

### **Report of the Chief Officer**

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## **1 Summary**

- 1.1 In November 2008 Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service (HFRS) published the Workforce Wellbeing Strategy, and it was agreed by the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority (HFRA) HR Committee that a review would be conducted after 12 months. However, due to a number of matters which needed earlier attention, at the Service Management Team (SMT) and HR Committee this review was delayed.
- 1.2 The Wellbeing Strategy was developed to adopt a more holistic approach to improving employee wellbeing within HFRS as well as to capture the significant resources already invested in reducing absence and concentrating on health promotion within the Service. Absence reduction initiatives have been successful but promoting health and wellbeing is likely to have increased benefits to the organisation in terms of productivity, motivation and being an attractive employer, as well as in reducing absence levels.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the HR Committee, support the content of the report and members assist with the positive promotion of the Wellbeing Strategy by championing the principles and practice it contains, and encourage the further development of innovative concepts to be included in the strategy.
- 2.2 That through their work with HFRS, elected members help to instil the holistic approach to wellbeing into our normal management practice through its consideration of Authority policy
- 2.3 That the strategy be reviewed after 12 months.

## **3 Review**

- 3.1 Since its introduction, the Wellbeing Strategy has been well received, although not widely publicised. It was felt important to work with the key stakeholders to

establish the strategy, the action plan that underpins it and the effectiveness of the Workforce Wellbeing Strategy Group before embarking on a wider communication programme. As a new concept introduced to the Service some embedding was needed with those key stakeholders before wider advertising. A structured communication programme commenced in January/ February 2010.

3.2 The Workforce Wellbeing Strategy Group (WWSG) meets on a quarterly basis and is made up of a cross section of representatives within the organisation. Currently, the action plan includes the following sections:

- Absence Reduction
- Fitness and Wellbeing
- Health Promotion
- Welfare
- Occupational Health
- Inclusive Workplaces
- Physical Environment
- Health and Safety
- HR & Training

The action plan is a working document which is regularly updated and expanded with new initiatives and planned activities. The progress of the action plan is reviewed at every quarterly meeting by the WWSG.

3.3 It has become increasingly apparent that the Wellbeing Strategy is a far reaching concept that touches almost everything that the Service does. The theory behind it is clear and positive, but because it has been deliberately understated there is more that can be done to promote it and its benefits to employees and the Service.

3.4 The Wellbeing Strategy should not be considered an 'Absence Reduction' initiative. It was not introduced for this purpose. Its purpose is to improve the physical and psychological environment to improve employee wellbeing and, in turn, their performance. If this is achieved, we can expect a reduction in days lost to sickness and an increase in individual and collective performance.

3.5 For some time, the Occupational Health & Welfare (OH&W) Team have aligned with their work with 'Prevention, Protection and Response'. The result is that we now have Health Surveillance in place in the departments that require this by law, and this enables our Occupational Health specialists to review processes and practices in a variety of workplaces to help ensure employees are protected from injury/illness. Without exception, the approach of the team is to concentrate on promoting health rather than responding to illness/injury. In particular, OH&W have concentrated on improving fitness levels of operational employees and significant progress has been made in this respect.

3.6 The Service has recently signed up to and have been awarded the 'Mindful Employer' Charter. To obtain this, we have successfully demonstrated that we are an employer who is positive about mental health in the workplace. We now display the Mindful Employer logo on our headed paper and website. Further

work is now being undertaken to ensure that we can meet the standards of the Mindful Employer Charter.

- 3.7 Included in the action plan is a commitment to tackle presenteeism\* within the Service. The cost of absence to organisations is known, but it is much harder to establish the cost of presenteeism, but recent research suggests that this problem is costing UK employers over £15bn per year. \*Presenteeism can be where an employee attends work when they are too unwell to do so, being present at work without being productive or they feel their job is too important or demanding for them to take time off (Business Wellbeing Network Annual Report).
- 3.8 In terms of the physical environment, there is a rolling programme of improvement and maintenance to Service property, which has been in existence for some time. This is now included in the action plan and is discussed at the WWSG meetings.
- 3.9 The providers for the Employee Assistance Programme, Fast Track Physiotherapy and the Occupational Health Physician have been out for tender over the last 6 months. New contracts started for all three providers on 1 March 2010. The Service's robust tendering process means we are confident that the best available service providers have been selected to provide high levels of quality and cost effective support to our employees.
- 3.10 An employee Stress Survey will be conducted in April/May 2010, and periodically after that. In September 2010, the Service will be running an all staff Cultural Survey. The WWSG is planning how HFRS will utilise and manage the results of both surveys and incorporate these into the Wellbeing Action Plan.
- 3.11 By April 2010 a small number of HFRS employees will be trained as workplace mediators. Mediation is increasingly used within organisations to resolve issues locally on an informal basis, and we are no different. Employees and managers will be able to request mediation to assist them in the early and low key resolution of matters affecting them at work. It is expected that this will result in fewer grievances and have a positive impact on absence levels.
- 3.12 A new policy, 'Developing Inclusive Workplaces (Prevention of Bullying & Harassment)' has been developed and recently issued. It replaces the Fairness & Dignity Policy. The aim of the policy is to create an environment for employees whereby they feel safe to raise issues without fear or ramification or the need to make a formal complaint.

#### **4 Supporting our corporate aims and objectives**

- 4.1 Improving the wellbeing of our employees supports all the Service's corporate objectives. Having an engaged, positive and healthy workforce will directly impact on the Service's ability to achieve the challenges we face.
- 4.2 Members are able to support the strategy by championing the principles and

practice in other areas of work within the Authority, for instance in Health and Safety, other committees and project work in which they become involved. Through encouraging officers and partners to further develop innovative concepts and ideas that support this strategy, members will enable the work to flourish and achieve its overarching aims. By helping to instil this holistic approach to wellbeing amongst all elected members through its consideration of Authority policy the members of the HR Committee can help integrate this new concept into our normal management practice.

## **5 People Impact Assessment**

- 5.1 A people impact assessment was developed for the Wellbeing Strategy when it was introduced and has been reviewed regularly since to ensure that any new impacts identified are addressed.
- 5.2 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

## **6 Resource implications**

### **6.1 Financial Implications**

The implementation of this strategy has not required additional funding as much of the activity to date has been part of planned work or initiatives. Existing financial (and other) resources have been utilised to support the initiatives as part of our holistic approach to the improvement of the wellbeing of our staff to date. In this respect this is, and should be seen as core activity for all those functions who have an impact on the people that work here. The Stress Survey and Mediation Training were budgeted for at the beginning of this financial year within existing budgets. The Cultural Survey has been budgeted for in the 2010/11 financial year.

- 6.2 It is becoming apparent that some funding for specific initiatives will be required if the Service wishes to implement them. These will be subject to our normal procedures for project based funding requests.

## **7 Consultation**

- 7.1 All recognised Trade Unions were fully consulted regarding the implementation and content of the Wellbeing Strategy and attend regular meetings. All Trade Unions are supportive of the continuation of the strategy and are keen to assist the Service to drive it forward. All areas of the Service are represented on the WWSG.
- 7.2 Trade Union representatives have been involved in the development of the Action Plan which underpins the Wellbeing Strategy.

## **8 Conclusion**

- 8.1 The Wellbeing Strategy has introduced a new way of considering the wellbeing of employees. The holistic approach puts the individual at the centre of our thinking. It is designed to gain benefits from all the positive actions we take that affect people and thereby value these as important aspects of our culture. The performance of individuals and teams is enhanced if they are fit, valued, well treated and feel that they are heard. The discretionary effort that people can put in at work, is much more likely to be given where an organisation is able to provide a supporting environment where the wellbeing of every individual is central to our management practice. This is what the Wellbeing Strategy aims to do.

## **9 Background papers**

- 9.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

Business Wellbeing Network Annual Report

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.