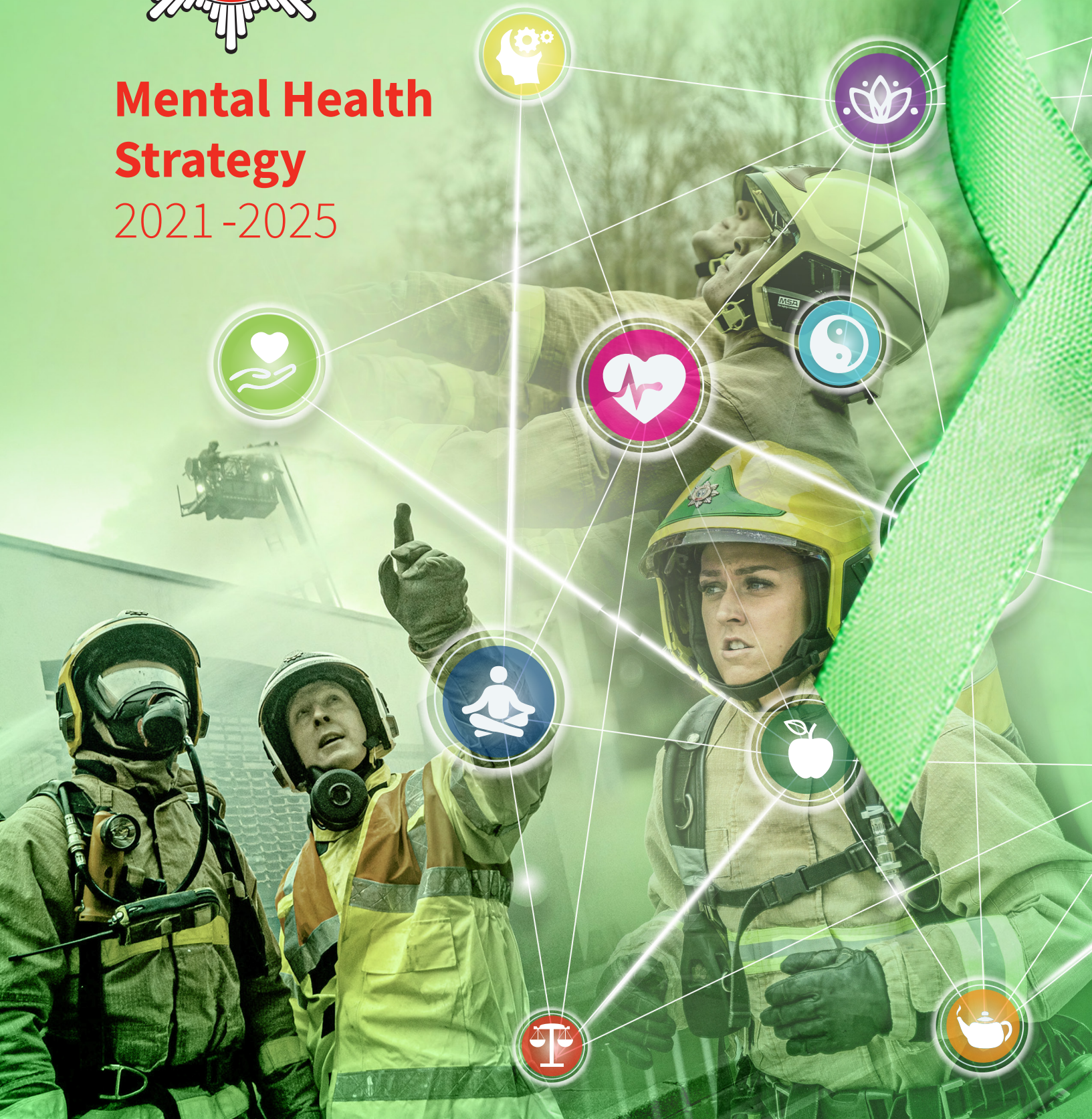




Mental Health Strategy 2021-2025





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Mark Cashin
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive
Cheshire Fire and
Rescue Service



**Councillor
Steve Wright**
Fire Authority Member
& Mental Health Champion

Our People - ‘Changing lives and saving lives’ every day...

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service’s vision is a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies which requires us to protect our communities, rescue people and protect the economic, environmental and community interests. Our core strength in achieving this is in our people, who strive to make a difference and who keep our communities safe, whilst changing, protecting and saving lives.

We recognise that in today’s increasingly complex and fast-paced world there is a general concern about the pressures in people’s lives that can have an impact on mental health and wellbeing. We also recognise that the nature of our Service is such that firefighters and fire staff may be exposed to traumatic and challenging situations.

Through our commitment to making mental health a corporate priority and by encouraging all staff to take responsibility for positive mental health and wellbeing, we believe that staff can fulfil their roles and operate within an environment that enables them to stay mentally fit with a positive sense of connection with others.

Through this strategy, we aim to describe how we will support the mental health and wellbeing of our staff over the next four years and how we will encourage the enjoyment of work and life, providing the tools and support to cope with the stresses and occasional sadness of life’s challenges.

The strategy will also outline how the Service intends to mainstream mental health awareness through engagement with staff and partners. It describes how our culture enables everyone to speak out openly about mental health concerns and how they are given access to positive and professional support without judgement.

Our main ambition for mental health is simple and that is to maintain a healthy and productive workforce. By creating a more proactive and preventative approach to mental health, we understand the importance of removing stigma and we are committed to treating mental health problems with the same passion and drive as we do with physical health problems.

This strategy will help the Service change and save more lives both in our communities and within our own organisation

Introduction and Background

Mental health is central to our quality of life, our social and emotional wellbeing, our personal experiences, our family life, all of which can impact on our work and performance.

The subject of mental ill health, the stigma attached to it, the devastating effects it can have and the support required to reduce and mitigate the associated impacts, has grown in prominence over the last number of years. Mental ill health comes in many guises, and can be very destructive if left undiagnosed or untreated.

At least one in four of the population will experience a mental health problem at some point during their life and it is estimated that mental ill health in England costs in the region of £105 billion each year. Treatment costs are expected to double in the next 20 years.

This has led to concerted efforts from the Government, health bodies and both public and private sector organisations to spotlight the challenges around mental ill health and provide the appropriate support and treatment.

To date, the Service has put in place a number of interventions which have raised awareness and have put heightened emphasis on the support available to staff. The Fire Authority has approved the establishment of a dedicated Mental Health Advisor and in recent months a Mental Health Steering Group has been created. The Steering Group which is comprised of a cross section of people from across the organisation will provide leadership, advice and will coordinate the work required to progress and support the Service's aspiration to be a beacon of excellence for mental health in the workplace.

We also believe that mental health is everyone's responsibility and whilst it is an essential part of every leader's role, all staff are encouraged to take a proactive approach towards enhancing their own mental health and wellbeing, and to support that of their colleagues.

The delivery of this strategy and the intention to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our employees is directly in line with the Service's Core Values where we strive to being inclusive, acting with compassion, making a difference and doing the right thing.

Causes of Mental Health Conditions

Many factors may cause or trigger episodes of mental ill health and an individuals' mental health can vary throughout their lifetime. This may be linked to life, attempts to cope with stress or to biological and developmental factors. Some outcomes from mental ill health can be devastating, not only to the person involved, but also to their loved ones, families and colleagues. They can also have an impact on an individual's physical health and wellbeing.

There are effective treatments for most mental health conditions and approaches that can help people manage. Without treatment and support, the outcomes of mental ill health can vary from psychological injury to mental illness, which can cause a range of effects from low level performance issues right through to suicide. It is vital that early identification and intervention takes place to ensure people access the support and treatment they need to improve their chances of a positive outcome.

It is acknowledged that repeated exposure to potentially traumatic events can be triggers of poor mental health for people in the Fire and Rescue Service.

The mental health charity Mind has conducted research into Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales. Their findings show that, due to nature of the work, Fire and Rescue Service staff are more at risk of developing mental ill health than the general population. The research also showed that 85% of Fire service staff have experienced stress and mental ill health at work. From this research, it suggests Fire and Rescue Service staff work hard to prevent mental health problems from affecting

their performance at work, which can have a negative impact on their personal relationships.

In support of the work conducted by Mind, a few years ago Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service signed the Mind Pledge and worked in conjunction with the charity to raise awareness and ensure a more proactive approach to mental health. This strategy will build on this initial work.

What can I do when I'm feeling overwhelmed?

Try a breathing exercise

For example breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.

Try a grounding exercise

To reconnect you with your surroundings. Look for and find one thing you can see, one you can touch, one you can hear, one you can smell and one you can taste.

Take a break

If it's possible, step away from what you are doing. You could read a book or a magazine, even if it's only for a few minutes.

Picture yourself somewhere you feel calm

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm. Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.


Listen to music

Really listen to the music. Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

Stay safe

If your feelings become overwhelming, and you have suicidal thoughts or you think you may self harm, remember that you can pick up the phone at any time of night or day and talk to the Samaritans on their 24 hour Freephone helpline: 116 123.

You might also find that our information on How to cope with suicidal feelings is helpful.
mind.org.uk/suicidalfeelings



Need support?

Samaritans

24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.
24-hour freephone helpline: 116 123
Email: jo@samaritans.org
Samaritans.org

The Mind Blue Light Infoline:

0300 303 5999
Lines are open 9am to 6pm,
Monday to Friday (except for bank holidays)
bluelightinfo@mind.org.uk
Text: 84999



Recognising our Legal Duty

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service recognises its legal duties to tackling stress and anxiety which could lead to mental ill health.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) expects us to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments for stress, and to take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment. They also set out Management Standards to define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where the risks from work-related stress are being effectively managed and controlled. The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design, that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor mental health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence.

In developing and implementing its Mental Health Strategy, the Service is mindful of the primary sources of stress at work which include:

● DEMANDS

This includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment

● SUPPORT

This includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

● ROLES

Whether individuals understand their role within the organisation and whether the Service ensures that they do not have ambiguous roles.

● CONTROL

How much say an individual has in the way they do their work.

● RELATIONSHIPS

This includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

● CHANGE

How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Service has other legal obligations including the Equality Act 2010 which relate to mental health in the workplace. These include making reasonable adjustments for staff with a mental health condition, protecting the privacy of a staff member who has a mental health condition, and ensuring that we do not take any adverse action against a staff member because of their mental health condition.

More recently, there has also been an emphasis on the ageing workforce, due to greater life expectancy, and against a backdrop of increased retirement ages, it is inevitable that there will be an increase of staff in the older age groups particularly in fire staff roles. This places more emphasis on creating a healthy workforce to sustain an older population of staff who may have greater health needs in the workplace.

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires us to ensure that we

Take measures to control any risk of stress

and under

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 we have to

Assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities

The Benefits of Taking Action

Creating an environment that supports and promotes the wellbeing of staff is ethically responsible. It also ensures that our organisation is meeting requirements to provide an environment that is both physically and mentally safe and healthy.

The clear rationale for helping employees remain healthy is that they are shown to take less sickness absence, have greater engagement in their work and are more productive.



A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace

World Health Organisation
2010



Other benefits that will be realised by having a mentally healthy workplace, include the following:

- Service delivery will improve and customer and stakeholder experiences are likely to be better when staff feel they have a good working environment, low emotional exhaustion, and feel valued and supported by their co-workers and manager/s.
- Reduced absenteeism and accidents in the workplace with higher levels of positive engagement, focus and improved performance.
- When staff are engaged, they are more willing to extend an extra hand or discretionary effort to assist others. The result is improved performance, wellbeing and teamworking.



Our Mental Health Strategy

This Strategy has been developed in partnership with Service managers, staff, members of the Mental Health Steering Group, Fire Authority Members and our Trade Unions to provide a framework that enables the entire Service to support positive mental health.

Our approach and aspiration is simply to prevent and treat mental health problems with the same commitment, passion and drive as we do with physical health problems.

We also believe mental health is everybody’s responsibility and there is an expectation that any stigma associated with mental health will be challenged and removed through education.

Regardless of whether mental ill health arises after attendance at a traumatic incident or through the course of everyday life, the Service already has a range of effective interventions and processes in place to support employees. The level and type of support varies and can be tailored to individual need based on the circumstances and cause.

These interventions are kept under regular review to ensure that they support this strategy and provide maximum benefit to staff. Consideration of new interventions and support mechanisms is also ongoing and by constantly reviewing our approach, we believe we have the ability to become even more proactive and identify mental health problems at an earlier stage.

Our Strategy comprises of four key elements:

1	Leadership and Responsibility	We believe that mental health is everyone’s responsibility and requires visible commitment from all staff across the Service, regardless of role or pay grade.
2	Communication and Education	We believe that the key to maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is through a systematic programme of engagement, promotion and education.

3	Support and Intervention	We will continue to support and intervene to improve mental health and are committed to increasing organisational confidence, skills and capability in addressing risks and dealing with mental health issues.
4	Culture and Compassion	We believe an open and compassionate culture around mental health is essential to eliminating stigma, and promoting a positive environment that reduces the exacerbation of existing mental health problems and concerns.



Cornerstones of the Strategy



Leadership & Responsibility

Making mental health everybody's responsibility

Everybody in the Service is expected to support mental health and wellbeing and mental health will be a strategic priority for everyone across the Service. This will be achieved by:

- Normalising mental health through regular engagement with staff and ensuring staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding mental health in the workplace.
- Adhering to relevant policy and guidance and participating in training and development activities relating to mental health issues.
- Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with line managers about stress and mental wellbeing of self, and in support of colleagues.
- Actively seeking out support and/or engaging in feedback processes concerning developments to support their own mental health or to support colleagues.
- Ensuring a consistent and positive approach to mental health and where appropriate, providing targeted individual mental health support.

Senior leaders and Fire Authority members are in a strong position to positively influence the working environment, management practices and experiences of employees. They have pledged a long-term commitment to improving the mental health of staff within the workplace which will be achieved by :

- Demonstrating a visible, active commitment and speaking openly about mental health in the workplace.
- Treating mental health with the same level of parity as physical health and integrating good health and safety management into all business decisions, policies and procedures.
- Direct involvement in mental health activities and progressing future plans in conjunction with the Mental Health Steering Group.
- Supporting investment and the allocation of necessary resources to further develop the skills and capabilities within the Service to address mental health issues and risks.
- Communicating a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and any form of discrimination or judgement associated with mental health.
- Providing flexible working conditions that promote employee mental health.



Communication & Education

Promoting understanding and awareness of mental health through effective and timely communication and engagement

We believe regular and ongoing communication is essential to help identify any barriers to addressing mental health and this, coupled with engagement and education, will contribute to timely and appropriate resolution of mental health challenges.

It is vital to educate staff about why good mental health is important and to provide access to training to increase knowledge and better equip them to deal with their own mental health concerns and/or support colleagues.

We have been raising awareness of mental health and the support available to our staff through our internal communication channels and within our training programmes. The Service intends to continue this by normalising mental health, talking about it, sharing experiences and raising awareness of support available. This will be achieved by:

- Training and supporting all staff in relation to mental health through the various stages of an individual's career – (e.g.: induction, promotion, retirement)
- Embedding mental health as a topic within our leadership development programmes and developing the capability of managers to address mental health problems.
- Regular communications and information around mental health, promoting awareness, momentum and service-wide appreciation for mental health education.
- Ensuring mental health information accessible to all staff via multiple communication channels, campaigns and events,
- Encouraging open dialogue and transparency around mental health through one to ones, team visits and bespoke workshops.
- Assigning mental health as a mandatory topic within the Service's training curriculum for all staff on an annual basis.
- Promoting all the networks available within the Service, publicising their activities and opportunities for involvement.
- Hosting and/or supporting regular events and campaigns to raise awareness and support mental health and wellbeing of staff from both a health, and collective/social perspective.



The role of a leader in creating a mentally healthy workplace is to promote awareness and importantly to promote a culture that allows people to take the steps they need to stay mentally healthy

Dr Andrew Wilson
Healthcare & Strategy,
Medibank



- Encouraging early disclosure of issues via open discussion and further enhancing accessibility to, and the range of, online health and wellbeing resources.
- Provision of opportunities for staff to be informed about financial wellbeing in respect of pensions, tax and retirement planning.



Support & Intervention

Providing the tools and support required to address mental health challenges amongst our staff

As a Service, we understand the importance of providing a positive and safe place to work and will ensure that both staff and managers have the tools and support that they need in respect of mental health.

A lot of provision is already in place and work will continue to ensure that we are able to offer comprehensive support to staff. Key areas of focus revolve around the following:

- Supporting the retention and rehabilitation of all employees as appropriate through reasonable adjustments that include phased return to work, flexible working, supporting treatment or variations to role, hours and work location.
- Ensuring staff have access to resources for reporting instances of bullying or harassment in any form. This will include further promotion of the Service's 'Who Do I Turn To' campaign to reinforce and remind staff of the support available to them in the event that they experience concerns or worries at work.
- Quarterly meetings of the Mental Health Steering Group, who act as a reference group for the Service to action and oversee the delivery of projects and proposals that affect the mental health and wellbeing of staff.
- Providing professional counselling facilities via the Service's Occupational Health Provider to support staff mental health.
- Providing resilience training, peer support and supervision for staff engaged in emotionally demanding work.
- Extending Mental Health First Aid training and TRiM practitioner training to a wider audience across the Service, to promote accessibility and enable more proactive and timely support.
- Establishing a process to monitor and address risks in respect of exposure to serious incidents.
- Prioritising mental health and offering reasonable adjustments and flexibility in respect of working hours, work location and duties to support mental health recovery.
- Broadening existing work with partners and specialist organisations to support the delivery of this strategy.

- Developing effective partnerships with specialist organisations to support the implementation of elements of our strategy.
- Providing specific suicide prevention support and intervention training for staff, in conjunction with local partners.
- Extending the network of people across the Service with additional mental health awareness and skills, such as Mental Health First Aiders and TRiM practitioners/supervisors, to offer peer support as needed.
- Encouraging the promotion and creation of informal activities and events relating to wellbeing.
- Considering the working environment for staff during estates modernisation to identify opportunities to improve spaces and facilities to support wellbeing.



Culture and Compassion

Creating a healthy and supportive environment where staff feel valued, empowered and able to declare if they need help

We understand that a healthy and supportive culture and work environment is reliant on good leadership and a consistent and positive approach to staff wellbeing.

To achieve this, it is important that our leaders demonstrate compassion and proactive consideration of the mental health and wellbeing of staff in their day to day work. We believe this is key to creating an open and inclusive environment that promotes trust and enables staff to be themselves and feel comfortable in seeking out support around their mental health when required.

We regularly seek feedback from staff through surveys with specific wellbeing content, and we will continue to engage with staff to measure the impact of our approach to mental health. Feedback to date has helped us to identify the following priorities:

- Incorporating mental health training within leadership development and induction programmes for all levels of staff.
- Ensuring all policies have due regard to the elimination of discrimination and promote an environment that enables staff to flourish and seek support without judgement or retribution.
- Normalising discussions around mental health to raise awareness of available support whilst promoting transparency and open dialogue.
- Incorporating consideration of mental health within project planning and change management processes, and providing safe and open communication forums where staff can express opinion and be open to new ideas.
- Promoting zero-tolerance of discrimination against staff who have a mental health condition through training for managers and all staff.

- Promoting the identity and value of Mental Health First Aiders, TRiM practitioners and Wellbeing Champions across the Service.
- Providing opportunities for staff to give feedback about issues related to mental health with options to give feedback anonymously, (e.g. through staff surveys, suggestion scheme, team meetings, dedicated email accounts, Safecall)
- Working closely with trade unions and staff groups to solicit feedback on how we can improve the mental health support we provide and to create a culture of inclusiveness on all matters relating to mental health.
- Recognising that we are all unique and will all respond differently to individual situations and keeping the individual at the heart of our strategy is key to its success.



Mental Health Governance and Monitoring

Involving our Staff

To progress our work around positive mental health, the Service has formalised its governance and monitoring arrangements through the creation of a Mental Health Steering Group. This group is chaired by a member of the Service Management Team, and comprises of Fire Authority representation, Trade Union colleagues and a range of staff from across the organisation who have skill, experience and/or an interest in mental health.

The purpose of the Mental Health Steering Group is to review, manage and evaluate the implementation of this strategy and to help deliver the associated action plan.

In addition to the establishment of the Mental Health Steering Group, staff will also be invited to support the service's mental health agenda through other service groups which include:

- Trauma Risk Management Practitioner Group
- Mental Health First Aiders
- Wellbeing Community Group
- Staff Engagement Forum
- Staff Networks

Listening to our Staff

To better understand how potential triggers and sources of stress are impacting the mental health of our workforce, Cheshire Fire and Rescue is proactive in terms of listening to its staff and seeking feedback.

Every two years the Service commissions an external provider to conduct an independent staff survey that solicits anonymous responses in the following areas (outlined below). Each survey theme is linked to the relevant Management Standard as outlined on page 6.

Purpose and Integrity:

This area considers views on job security, how individual roles contribute to the organisation and potential experiences of bullying or discrimination. (*Roles, Relationships*)

Enablement:

This asks for perceptions around communications, managing performance and whether staff feel they have the tools and equipment to do their roles well. (*Control, Support, Relationships, Change*)

Autonomy:

Seeking views regarding staff feeling able to get on with their job and being able to manage the demands of their role. *(Control, Demands, Support)*

Reward:

This area considers views on valuing and recognising staff and investing in their future careers. *(Relationships, Support)*

Leadership:

This looks at perceptions on relationships with leaders and line managers and how the organisation manages change. *(Support, Relationships and Change)*

Recent staff surveys have also contained specific questions to gauge the mental health and wellbeing of staff. This information has been used to help tailor specific awareness programmes or interventions should the data suggest this is an area of focus.

The most recent full staff survey and the Covid-19 survey revealed that overall, the mental health and wellbeing of staff was perceived to be positive (89% of staff saying their health was good overall) and that placing a greater emphasis on mental health and wellbeing was a welcome development.

This suggests that the Service is operating from a solid foundation with some significant good practice already in place.

However, with the continuation of Covid-19 pandemic and the normal activities that staff undertake, it will be important to continue to promote positive mental health and wellbeing so that early and appropriate support can be provided.

Reporting on our Performance

The Mental Health Steering Group meets quarterly and monitors performance by means of a mental health action plan.

Bi-annual performance updates are reported to the Service Management Team and the Fire Authority's Staffing Committee with a report submitted for review by the Fire Authority on an annual basis.

Mental Health Policies and Resources

Wellbeing Impact Assessments

It is imperative that all current and developing policy and change programmes are reviewed with regard to the potential impact on the mental health of staff.

The Service has introduced a wellbeing impact assessment that ensures any potential impacts and staff groups to be impacted are recorded and removed or mitigated where possible. The Mental Health Advisor provides oversight and guidance in the completion of wellbeing impact assessments.

Associated Policies and Resources

The following policies and resources support the Service's efforts to create and maintain a culture of positive mental health.

- Attendance Management Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Occupational Health provision
- Staff Counselling Service
- Stress Risk Assessments
- Flexible Working Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Pay and Recognition Policy
- Parental Policies: Maternity; Paternity; Adoption;
- Working from Home Guidance
- Covid Secure Workplace Management and Staff Guides
- Mental Health Training and Awareness Programmes
- Trauma Risk Management Policy
- TRiM Policy
- 'Who do I turn to?' campaign
- Appraisal Process
- Attendance Management Toolkit - Management and Staff Guides
- Confidential Safecall facility
- Access to trade union representation



Our **Core Values**



Be Inclusive

By acting fairly, with integrity, respect and without prejudice.



Do the Right Thing

By holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.



Act with Compassion

By being understanding and offering help to each other and to our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.



Make a Difference

By making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

If you require this document in larger print or in an alternative format, please contact us at:
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