

Case Study: Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service

Developing a robust mental health at work plan

In December 2020, we published our [2021-2025 Mental Health Strategy](#) signifying our commitment to ensuring mental health is an ongoing priority for our service. We took an inclusive approach when developing the strategy, partnering with service managers, employees, the elected members of our fire authority and trade unions to provide a framework that enables the entire organisation to support our main aim – to maintain a mentally healthy and thriving workforce.

Underpinning our strategy is senior leader buy-in, having pledged a long-term commitment to improving the mental health of staff within the workplace, including their direct involvement in shaping and embedding our plans. Our strategy is comprised of four cornerstones, all of which dovetail with the core standards of the Mental Health at Work Commitment. Each cornerstone contains a clearly defined list of action points, outlining what our primary focuses are, the rationale behind them and how we will meet them.

To progress our work, our service has formalised its governance and monitoring arrangements through the creation of a Mental Health Steering Group and appointment of a Mental

Health Advisor. The steering group is chaired by a member of the Service Management Team (SMT) and is comprised of a range of external stakeholders and staff who have skill, experience and/or an interest in mental health.

The steering group will review, manage and evaluate the implementation of our strategy and help deliver the associated action plan, facilitated through quarterly meetings. Our plans also include bi-annual performance updates, which are reported to the SMT and the fire authority's staffing committee, with a report submitted annually for review by the full fire authority on an annual basis.

To better understand the needs of our people and how we can best meet them, staff will also be routinely invited to support and provide feedback on our mental health agenda through other groups within our service, including our Trauma Risk Management Practitioner Group, Mental Health First Aiders, Wellbeing Community Group, Staff Engagement Forum and staff inclusion networks.

Complementing this, every two years we commission an external provider to conduct an independent staff survey that solicits anonymous responses on a range of factors to gauge the mental health and wellbeing of staff. This information has been used to help tailor specific programmes or interventions should the data suggest this is an area of focus. Our most recent full staff survey revealed that staff welcomed the greater focus on mental health and wellbeing.

We are also placing emphasis on policy development, with a view to undertaking a wellbeing impact assessment of current policy and change programmes. This ensures that any potential impacts on staff groups are recorded and removed or mitigated wherever possible. Our Mental Health Advisor provides oversight and guidance in the completion of wellbeing impact assessments.

Lawrence Howard,
Mental Health and Wellbeing Advisor

