

READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

DATE OF MEETING:	11 OCTOBER 2019	AGENDA ITEM:	6
REPORT TITLE:	TIME TO CHANGE: RBC EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN REFRESH		
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ORGANISATION:	READING BOROUGH COUNCIL		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines Reading Borough Council's progress to date in delivering on a 'Time to Change' Employer Pledge to end mental health discrimination, and sets out the ambitions of a refreshed Action Plan for 2019/2020 which is due to be launched this October.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Health and Wellbeing notes the actions which Reading Borough Council has committed to as a Time to Change employer, and how these support and promote wellbeing in the borough.

3. BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council is a significant local employer, with 1,702 staff currently on its payroll, many of whom are also Reading residents. How the Council supports staff health and wellbeing can therefore have a direct impact on the health of the town. Indirectly, by modelling the behaviours it would like to see in other employers, the authority can potentially have a much wider impact. This is very much the role envisaged for public sector employers in the independent review of 'Thriving at Work'.¹
- 3.2 'Time to Change' is a national campaign, led by the charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, to end mental health discrimination. Because the attitudes of others can stop people with mental health problems getting the help and support they need, the campaign encourages pledges to 'open up' to mental health, to talk and to listen.
- 3.3 The Time to Change Employer Pledge signals an organisation's commitment to change how people think and act about mental health in that workplace, and make sure that employees who are facing mental health challenges feel supported. Signatories can come from any sector.

¹ Department for Work and Pensions (2019) *Thriving at Work: the Stevenson / Palmer review of mental health and employers*

- 3.4 There is a clear economic driver for organisations to recognise and address mental health challenges. Deloitte has calculated the cost of poor mental health in the UK workplace to be between £33bn and £42bn a year - equivalent to £497 - £2564 per employee. Whilst overall workplace absence through illness is declining, mental health related absence is on the increase,² and official statistics probably under-estimate the impact of poor mental health given that a 2017 survey found that 51% of employees would not be comfortable talking to their line manager about a mental health issue.³ Time to Change's own findings are that 95% of employees calling in sick because of stress have given a different reason.
- 3.5 Time to Change makes the case that looking after the mental health of employees makes business sense and increases productivity. The rationale is that encouraging people to talk about their mental health can make a real difference to sickness absence rates, staff wellbeing and productivity. It also means that people are more likely to seek support before reaching crisis point resulting in them being signed off sick for longer periods. By taking action, employers can increase staff loyalty and sense of investment in their organisation which in turn increases retention rates.

4. READING BOROUGH COUNCIL'S TIME TO CHANGE ACTION PLAN

2017 Action Plan

- 4.1 In 2017, Reading Borough Council developed a proposal for how the authority could deliver on a Time to Change Employer Pledge. This was approved by the national Time to Talk team, and at the October 2017 Health and Wellbeing Board, Cllr Hoskin signed the Time to Change Employer Pledge on behalf of the Council.
- 4.2 The Council's Time to Change Action Plan is owned by a group of Champions who have been recruited from across the authority. The Champions are supported through training, peer mentoring and access to Time to Change resources. There are currently 50 Champions, representing each Directorate and most services. Champions meetings and Champion-led events have taken place across the various Council sites.
- 4.3 In line with the original Action Plan, the Champions have been instrumental in promoting staff mental wellbeing via internal communications, a review of Human Resources policies, and the promotion of a new Employee Assistance Programme. Invited speakers have shared lived experience of mental health challenges and information about the Dementia Friends programme. The Samaritans have also provided training on Managing Difficult Conversations. Anti-stigma activities have included a fundraising bake off, a riverside dog walk and a quiz hosted by the Chief Executive - all used as opportunities to start conversations amongst staff about mental health.
- 4.4 Compass Recovery College has played a key role in the Council's Time to Change activities. Compass offers a range of courses on managing mental wellbeing, all developed and run by people with lived experience of mental health challenges. These are open to all. The Compass ethos raises the profile of mental health and challenges assumptions about the options open to someone living with a mental health diagnosis or common mental health problem.

2019 Action Plan

- 4.5 The Champions have prepared a refreshed action plan in readiness for World Mental Health Day 2019 (10th October), using an amended format which builds on the standards,

² Office for National Statistics (2017) *Sickness Absence in the Labour Market 2016*

³ Business in the Community (2017) *Mental Health at Work*

recommendations, evidence base and best practice guidance found in the 2017 Thriving at Work Report.

- 4.6 Whilst awareness raising activity continues to be a feature, the refreshed plan recognises the need to mainstream and normalise mental health conversations. There is therefore an increased emphasis on embedding mental health awareness within the organisation's day to day business - through Human Resources policies, supervision processes and wider staff meetings. The new Action Plan is informed by the latest staff survey findings, and links to commitments made on the back of that, such as enhanced support to tackle bullying and 'back to the floor' sessions for managers.
- 4.7 There is an ambition to increase the number of Time to Change Champions within the organisation, and to support a wider cohort to engage at this level - by offering flexibility around the commitment required alongside securing robust organisational support for and recognition of the Champions' role. Using a variety of media, the Champions will disseminate messages across the organisation to keep mental health on every relevant agenda. The Champions will also continue to capitalise on wider media promotion linked to national campaigns, such as Time to Talk Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO READING'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Delivering on the Council's Time to Change Action Plan will contribute to several of the priorities set out in the 2017-20 Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Reading.
- By supporting people's self-esteem, Time to Change actions empower people to make healthier lifestyle choices (Priority 1), including reducing alcohol consumption to safe levels (Priority 5)
 - By promoting a workplace culture in which colleagues look out for and support one another, particularly at difficult times, and help to keep people in work, Time to Change actions help to reduce loneliness and social isolation (Priority 2)
 - By modelling supportive and anti-discriminatory treatment of anyone who has experienced mental health challenges, Time to Change actions help to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in children and young people (Priority 3)
 - By encouraging people to identify mental health difficulties and seek support, Time to Change actions help to reduce deaths by suicide (Priority 4)
 - By improving understanding of mental health conditions broadly, and dementia in particular, Time to Change actions help to make Reading a place where people can live well with dementia (Priority 6)
- 5.2 In addition, Time to Change actions build on all of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy foundations. By encouraging those experiencing mental health difficulties to talk and seek help, the actions help to safeguard those who are vulnerable. The actions to raise staff awareness of local support aligns with the aim to offer high quality co-ordinated information to support wellbeing.

6. COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1 The Time to Change Employer Action Plan is a commitment internal to Reading Borough Council so wider community engagement is not a prerequisite. However, the plan has been developed by staff from across the Council. There is an aspiration to work with other local employers to share experience and develop best practice.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 The Time to Change Action Plan explicitly aims to eliminate discrimination against people who have experienced mental health difficulties and may be regarded as having a protected characteristic under the Equality Act on that basis. As such, it should advance equality of opportunity, and any differential impact on persons with a protected characteristic will be positive. An Equality Impact Assessment is not therefore needed.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Time to Change Action Plan (2019) will be delivered within existing resource and as such there are no direct financial implications.