

Health and Wellbeing policy

1 Purpose

- 1.1 Healthwatch Worcestershire recognises that work can have a positive impact on an employee's health and wellbeing, providing self-esteem, companionship and status - and that healthy and well-motivated employees can have an equally positive impact on the output and effectiveness of the organisation.
- 1.2 However, while the benefits of work greatly outweigh any disadvantages, work can sometimes be bad for employee health, particularly in the form of mental health and musculoskeletal disorders.
- 1.3 It is Healthwatch Worcestershire's stance that early intervention and effective prevention is better than cure.
- 1.4 Through this policy, working in parallel with our 'Health and Safety policy' and 'Managing Absence policy', we will aim to support employees to achieve a healthy work:life balance, good physical and mental health and maximum attendance at work.
- 1.5 This policy is not contractual and does not form part of an employee's contract of employment. Healthwatch Worcestershire reserves the right to make amendments to this policy from time to time at its sole discretion.

2 What makes a healthy workplace?

- 2.1 A healthy workplace is likely to have:
 - managers who are confident and trained in people skills;
 - employees who feel valued and involved;
 - a robust 'Health and Safety policy', with commitment from Board level;
 - a 'Managing Absence' policy helping people to stay at work or get back to work sooner;
 - 'Return to work' interviews providing two-way communication and identifying preventative measures to minimise repeat absences;
 - jobs which are flexible and well designed, giving employees an element of control in the way they do their work;
 - managers who have an awareness of the most common health problems such as mental health and musculoskeletal disorders and can signpost to service and support functions such as GP, counselling, physiotherapy and diagnostic services.

3 Mental health

- 3.1 Mental health is defined as "a state of wellbeing with the ability to cope, work productively and fruitfully and be able to make a contribution to one's community".
- 3.2 Stress is a symptom of poor mental health and is the biggest cause of sickness absence in the UK and increasing (15.4 million days lost in 2017/18). Stress itself is not an illness, but can lead to feelings of anxiety, demotivation, low mood and depression and can have a negative impact on the physical health of the body.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) identifies the main causes of stress in the workplace as

- change (need for, effect of and how well communicated);
- demands on employees;
- level of control over the way employees do their work;
- poor support from managers;
- role (clarity, ambiguity, conflict);
- relationships at work.

Outside the workplace, additional stress can be caused by a wide variety of issues which include:

- debt problems;
 - relationship problems;
 - bereavement;
 - family problems (sometimes related to childcare or elder care);
 - health worries (own or family members);
 - moving house;
 - alcohol and drug use.
- 3.3 Healthwatch Worcestershire will ensure that its managers have an awareness of stress management techniques and will support staff who are not coping, including signposting to counselling services where appropriate.
- 3.4 Managers will personally set a good example of managing work:life balance and will encourage staff to
- manage their working hours;
 - use their full holiday entitlement;
 - take proper breaks, never working in excess of 6 hours without at least a 20 minute break

4 Musculoskeletal Disorders

- 4.1 Musculoskeletal disorders (ie disorders affecting the muscles, nerves and tendons) such as neck pain and backache are the second biggest cause of sickness absence in the UK (6.6 million days lost in 2017/8).

The HSE has identified some of the risks that can lead to musculoskeletal disorders and these include repetitive and heavy lifting, bending and twisting repeatedly and exerting too much force.

- 4.2 Within Healthwatch Worcestershire, the single most likely contributory factor to musculoskeletal disorder is poor posture at the workstation.
- 4.3 In line with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended)*, Healthwatch Worcestershire will ensure that a workplace assessment is carried out each time there is:
- a new appointment;
 - replacement of equipment (desk, chairs, computer);
 - an office move;
 - any other occasion when an employee or manager identifies that there may be a problem.

Reasonable adjustments will be provided in line with the workplace assessment.

* *See Healthwatch Worcestershire Display Screen Equipment Policy*

- 4.4 Where adjustments do not resolve the problem, managers will signpost to service and support functions which may on occasion include physiotherapy or diagnostic services (eg scans).

5 Referral to external providers

- 5.1 Where external intervention may help an employee to stay at work, or may assist an earlier return from sick leave or a shorter recuperation period, consideration will be given to funding external services such as counselling, physiotherapy or diagnostic services.

This will be subject to analysis on a 'case by case' basis dependent upon what services can be sourced through the employee's own GP, length of waiting lists, employee's own medical insurance, etc.

- 5.2 Where external funding is required, a 'Request for External Support' form will be completed by the Managing Director and will be subject to authorisation by the designated Director.

5.3 Where appointments are funded and the employee does not attend as arranged (without good reason), they will be considered liable for the cost of treatment.

6 How employees can help themselves

6.1 Employees are expected and obliged to take responsibility for their own health and will be encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle including sensible diet, moderation of alcohol intake and regular exercise.

6.2 Employees will be encouraged to consider a Health 'cash plan' where for a modest monthly payment, financial assistance can be provided with regard to dental, optical, health screening, physiotherapy, osteopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, chiropody, podiatry and hospital in-patient benefits.

7 Confidentiality

7.1 All health issues will be conducted with respect for confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended).

8 Audit and Review

8.1 A review of this policy will take place annually unless legal, contractual, specific business requirements, operational changes or events necessitate an earlier review.

8.2 This policy will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment under the Public Sector Equality Duty Act 2010.