



Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Approach to Mental Health in the Workplace

2019 - 2021

APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

1. INTRODUCTION

Mind Research (2016) highlighted that Emergency services personnel experience more mental health problems but they are less likely than the general workforce to take time off work as a result. Emergency services personnel are also twice as likely to identify problems at work as the main cause of their psychological health problems, compared to the general workforce population.

Work is a key part of our lives and can provide a sense of wellbeing, purpose, social contact and status. The service recognises the link between the control of health risks, the general health of employees and the success of the service itself. Supporting employees to be mentally healthy is legally, financially and morally the right thing to do.

In the past 5 years, work has been done to break down the barriers of stigma around mental health and importantly, both real and perceived peer opinions and attitudes. Key to this is reassurance that it is actually a courageous step to take control of mental health and want to make positive changes.

Within the Service work has been done around trauma; the introduction of Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) in 2016 helped to inform and reassure our people that they will be supported when facing some of the challenging aspects of the fire service role. Specialist trauma therapy is promptly available should there be any complications with trauma reactions.

Inclusion and Diversity are now firmly embedded and on track to provide further open and supportive forums and conditions of work which can only help to improve overall wellbeing and mental health.

2. OUR COMMITMENT

We will do all that we can to support our people in managing their mental health. We will tackle stigma and deliver appropriate support to employees and volunteers. This will better enable them to meet the emotional and psychological challenges of working in a fire and rescue service and help to maintain an appropriate work-life balance.

We are committed to supporting and protecting, as far as it is able, the mental health of all employees. We recognise the effects that today's wider social and psychological influences have on mental health and we take into account the whole person and their environment.

Through a combination of information, reassurance, education, enabling supporting and treating, we will strive to improve and maintain the psychological wellbeing of the workforce, encouraging employees to take personal responsibility for their mental health and wellbeing.

We will aim to improve mental health, engagement and wellbeing across all areas of the organisation. This will lead to improvements in attendance, higher morale, better employee engagement and an increased sense of wellbeing in its broadest sense.

3. DELIVERING OUR COMMITMENT

As part of our People Strategy which includes a commitment to health and wellbeing, we have developed an approach to supporting mental health in the workplace. This approach has 3 key elements:



Informing and reassuring through a continual process of providing information and resources; enabling our people to make the best choices they can about their mental health, enabling them to reach out and seek help.

Educating and enabling by building on information to embed knowledge. This is particularly important for our managers and supervisors – those who are day-to-day in contact with their teams and who interact with them in both work and at times social settings; those who may notice changes in personality and behaviors.

Supporting and treating through early intervention and the commencement of recovery; enabling people to return to the workplace sooner and with the necessary support. We will also engage with the NHS where necessary and appropriate to ensure that the individual obtains the best medium to long term care.

To help us bring this approach to life, we will:

- Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan
- Develop mental health awareness among employees
- Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling
- Provide employees with good working conditions and ensure that they have a healthy work-life balance and opportunities for development
- Promote effective people management through line managers and supervisors
- Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.
- Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting
- Demonstrate accountability
- Improve the disclosure process
- Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help.

4. MONITORING OUTCOMES

As part of our day-to-day activities, the Occupational Health & Wellbeing team will continue to report against an agreed set of local performance indicators including mental health referrals and sickness absence statistics. Additional questions around wellbeing within the employee survey will also be explored to enable the Service to measure and benchmark our wellbeing index. Performance against progress of the holistic People strategy will also be developed and reviewed.