

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Staff Governance
DATE	31 January 2019
REPORT TITLE	Employee Assistance Service July – September 2018
REPORT NUMBER	RES/19/052
DIRECTOR	Steven Whyte
CHIEF OFFICER	Isla Newcombe
REPORT AUTHOR	Rebekah Walker
TERMS OF REFERENCE	5.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report updates the Committee on utilisation of the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) provided by Time for Talking during the 3-month period July – September 2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee:

- 2.1 Considers the contents of the report; and
- 2.2 Instructs the Director of Resources to request evidence from Functions on the actions taken to support individuals and address trends (usage and root causes) as detailed in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following a joint tender evaluation process with Aberdeenshire Council, Therapeutic Counselling Services Ltd. (Time for Talking) were awarded the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) contract. The new contract commenced on 01 January 2017 and is for a duration of 3 years with the option of extending for a further period of up to 24 months.
- 3.2 This report contains utilisation information on the 3 month reporting period (July – September 2018). The provided information reflects the revised Function structure. This report therefore has limited comparison figures for the corresponding period reported under the previous Directorate structure.

Utilisation (July – September 2018)

- 3.3 A total of 37 referrals were made during July to September 2018, 36 from employees and 1 from a family member. The overall figure is similar to the last

reporting period (April – June 2018) of 38. There were a higher number of referrals relating to Personal Issues (27) compared to Work Related Issues (10) the same trend as the last reporting period. The greatest number of referrals was 19 from Operations, this includes Integrated Children's and Family Services and Operations and Protective Services. In comparison to the previous reporting period of 23 referrals from the same Function.

- 3.3.1 Overall the provided utilisation information shows similar trends to the last reporting period with the related services. Work Related Issues remain similar to last period, with Demands (Workload/ Stress/Anxiety) being the most common reason for utilisation.
- 3.3.2 Of the personal issues 17 out of 27 relate to Personal Stress/Depression/Anxiety. This accounts for 63% of the personal issue referrals; this is lower than the last reporting period of 69%. Of the Work-Related Issues 9 referrals related to Demands (Workload/ Stress/Anxiety) and 1 referral related to relationship with line manager. This figure is similar to the previous reporting period of 10 (for demands) and 0 for relationship with line manager.
- 3.3.3 51% of all referrals came from operations (19/37). This percentage is to be expected as 68% of all employees work in the Operations Function.
- 3.4 A person can experience excessive pressure and demands outside work just as much as they can at work. Stress tends to build up over time because of a combination of factors that may not all be work related. Conflicting demands of work and home can cause excessive stress. Stressors at home can affect those at work and vice versa. The “adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them” (HSE, 2018) can seriously undermine the quality of people's working lives and, in turn, the effectiveness of the workplace.
- 3.4.1 The breakdown of figures by Function and issue for the period July to September 2018 is shown in the table below: -

Functions	Number of Staff within Service	% of Staff usage	Number of referrals	Personal Issues	Health/Bereavement	Addiction/Abuse	Relationship/Family Issues	Personal Stress/Depression/Anxiety/Anger	Traumatic Incident	Work Related Issues	Change (Organisational/redundancy)	Demands (Workload/Stress/Anxiety)	Relationships (with colleagues)	Relationships with manager (Bullying Harassment)	Role (Understanding of)	Support (discipline & grievance)	Control
Commissioning	101	0.00	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Customer	1189	0.93	11		1	0	1	5	0		0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Operations	5151	0.37	19		2	0	3	10	0		0	3	0	1	0	0	0
AHSCP	607	0.66	4		1	0	0	2	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Resources	327	0.31	1		0	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Governance	81	1.23	1		0	0	1	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Place	156	0.00	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foster Carers	0	0.00	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Elected Members	0	0.00	0		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family Member	0	0.00	1		1	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number of Referrals/C'ling	7612	3.493	37		5	0	5	17	0		0	9	0	1	0	0	0

3.5 The numbers of referrals for the same reporting period (July to September 2018) are higher than the last 3 years. However more has been done to increase awareness of the service for example posters have been displayed in all workplaces, new information leaflets have been produced and all employees have been personally given a wallet card by their line manager with Time for Talking contacts details.

- July – September 2015 26
- July – September 2016 30
- July – September 2017 29
- July – September 2018 37

3.6 The percentage of the Council's workforce that used the service is detailed below, along with similar sized local authorities' industry averages for comparison for the reporting period:

Council A – Aberdeen City Council	0.49%
Council B	0.54%
Council C	0.33%
Council D	0.57%

3.7 During this quarter only fulltime employees (36) used the service. Female utilisation has increased very slightly (27 from 26) with male utilisation decreasing (13 to 10) in the last reporting period. The majority of employees are at work (22) compared to those absent from work (14) when receiving support. One family member has used the service.

Full details are shown in the table below: -

	Demographics						
	Male	Female	Full Time	Part Time		Currently at work	Absent from work
Commissioning	0	0	0	0		0	0
Customer	3	8	11	0		6	5
Operations	2	17	19	0		12	7
AHSCP	3	1	4	0		2	2
Resources	1	0	1	0		1	0
Governance	0	1	1	0		1	0
Place	0	0	0	0		0	0
Foster Carers	0	0	0	0		0	0
Elected Members	0	0	0	0		0	0
Family Member	1	0	0	0		0	0
	10	27	36	0		22	14

***Family member not included in Full / Part Time or at Work / Absent at work categories

3.8 All referrals made in this reporting period were self-referrals. The assistance provided was mainly via face to face counselling (25) with an increased number of telephone counselling (4 to 10). During the reporting period no employees were given additional sessions. Employees were made aware of the service via a range of means as detailed in the table below.

	Assistance Provided							Type of Referral			How Employees heard about Service				
	Helpline/Advice Only	No contact from client	Telephone Counselling	Face to face counselling	CBT Counselling Sessions	Live Zilla Counselling sessions	Management Referral	Self Referral	Website/Posters/Leaflets	Managers	Colleagues	HR	Wallet Cards		
Commissioning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	8	13	9	0		
Customer	0	1	2	8	0	0	0	11							
Operations	1	0	6	12	0	0	0	19							
AHSCP	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4							
Resources	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1							
Governance	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1							
Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Foster Carers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Elected Members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Family Member	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1							
	1	1	10	25	0	0	0	37							

- 3.9 Service users are offered the opportunity to provide feedback on the service via a short questionnaire. 7 anonymous questionnaires have been completed by service users in the last reporting period. Feedback on the most helpful aspect of the counselling service included; support in a time of crisis, help to see things differently and build personal resources, a focus on the individual's own needs.

Actions

- 3.10 It is critical that Function leads, and responsible line management ensure that suitable and sufficient action is being taken to support individuals and address trends (usage and root causes). This includes the application of the Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace Policy and the Management of Stress Procedure. Other improvement actions suggested include:
- Adoption and delivery of the mental health action plan as tabled to this committee today
 - Sharing with Function leads the information in this report so that local action plans can be developed
 - Continued communication and advocacy of the service provided by Time for Talking
 - Completion of risk assessments to assist in identifying, understanding and addressing factors that affect employees' mental health and wellbeing. Functions should be proactively completing Quality of Working Lives (QWL's) risk assessments for teams (and in some cases individuals) to identify improvement areas as detailed in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards;
 - Completion of Line Manager Competency Indicator Tool (HSE) for managers to assess whether they currently have the behaviours identified as effective for preventing and reducing stress at work. This will assist managers reflect on their behaviour and management style and adapt as necessary;
- 3.11 People and Organisation will continue to advertise the service but must not rely on the EAS to address the issues. Local mental health charities will continue to be worked with to raise awareness of mental health. If no action is taken to address the root causes of issues and related absence the referral utilisation figures will continue to remain the same.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial consequences resulting from this report. The award price has been calculated on the expected usage. If usage climbs above the expected level, there will be a cost implication and a sharp increase in usage should be investigated and considered.
- 4.2 An effective EAS service supports individuals with difficulties in their lives; sometimes these problems can affect an individual's ability to function fully at work or at home. This in turn may impact on their health and wellbeing, which may also impact on their productivity, attendance and associated costs. Both direct and indirect costs require to be considered.

- 4.3 The longer an employee is off work the more challenging it becomes to manage their health problems and less likely that they will return to work. Long-term absence is costly. There is mutual benefit if we can proactively support employees in the workplace and help employees avoid long waiting times for, e.g. counselling or psychological therapy.
- 4.4 Failure to comply with legislation in ensuring a safe and healthy workplace has the potential to result in enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Such intervention can result in potential prosecution (criminal) equally, employees (civil claims) are more likely to succeed following as successful HSE prosecution. Changes in the Sentencing and Fines Guidance for health and safety non-compliances are resulting in increased financial penalties. Fine starting points are based on an organisation's turnover. As Local Authorities do not have turnover; Annual Revenue Budget is deemed to be the equivalent. This amount is then altered depending on the culpability of the organisation and harm factors to employees and members of the public.
- 4.5 There is also the potential for employment tribunal associated costs if an employee was to make an employment related claim against the Council.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 there is a legal requirement to ensure the health safety and welfare at work of our employees. This includes minimising the risk of stress-related illness or injury to employees.
- 5.2 The provision of an EAS is in line with guidance produced by the HSE as one of the measures to control that risk. One person in four in the UK will experience a mental health problem in their lives.
- 5.3 HSE potential prosecution (criminal) can attract fines, imprisonment and remedial orders. There is also the possibility of employee claims (civil). Provision of an EAS can be used as mitigation against potential claims from employees exposed to work related stress.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

- 6.1 The risks with the potential to impact the decision being sought from the Committee are categorised as:

	Risk	Low (L), Medium (M), High (H)	Mitigation
Financial	If no action is taken to support individuals and address trends, then the organisation will incur both direct and indirect costs.	M	Implementation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace Policy and supporting Stress

			<p>Procedure. Effective management and maintenance of a mentally healthy workplace and provision of appropriate support. Review and identification of EAS use and related absence to act on lessons learned. Corporate and individual awareness of mental health in the workplace. Active monitoring of work-loads.</p>
Legal	<p>Compliance with legal requirements ensures the health and safety of employees. Poor management of the risks and lack of support has the potential to attract enforcement action (criminal and civil).</p>	M	<p>As above. Assessment of risk via stress and QWL's risk assessments with identification and implementation of safe working arrangements. Functions acting on utilisation, trend and root cause information to develop and implement controls to prevent a reoccurrence. Completion of Line Manager Competency Indicator Tool (HSE) by line managers acting on feedback. Provision of specialist support / advice.</p>
Employee	<p>Ineffective support during challenging times impacting on an employee's personal health and wellbeing. This has the potential to affect their resilience and ability to function at work and with general life events. This can result in employee ill health and related absence. The longer an employee is absent the more likely it will impact on an employee's health and wellbeing and the less likely</p>	M	<p>As above. Provision of information, instruction and training as identified in Job Profiles, skills and training matrices and in risk assessment. Open and clear two-way communication at all levels within the organisation. Non-judgmental and proactive support provided to employees</p>

	that they will return to the workplace.		who experience mental health problems. Good self-management of personal wellbeing and resilience.
Customer	Reduced quality of service delivery owing to the lack of resource. No identification of trends and root causes will not address or prevent reoccurrence and not ensure a safe and healthy employee workplace.	M	As above.
Environment	No risk or impact was identified.	-	-
Technology	No risk or impact was identified.	-	-
Reputational	Without ensuring suitable employee support there is a risk of the organisation not being seen as an employer of choice and having recruitment and retention issues. Potential civil or criminal action against the organisation will also adversely impact upon its reputation.	L	As above.

7. OUTCOMES

Local Outcome Improvement Plan Themes	
	Impact of Report
Prosperous Economy	An EAS assists in having a workforce which is healthier, happier and better motivated, which is essential to the sustainability of high quality services. This in turn has a corporate social responsibility ripple effect impacting on the health of the wider community. By taking a proactive approach to health, safety the “public pound” will be used effectively reducing lost resource through direct and indirect costs.

<p>Prosperous People</p>	<p>By reducing the impact of personal issues that an employee may encounter such as stress, bereavement or debt we can substantially reduce the negative impact of such issues on their productivity, efficiency and overall behaviour at work. Through the provision of support, employees' resilience improves enabling them to deal with life and work challenges more positively. As well as impacting on productivity it also assists in maximising attendance. It is difficult to control outside stressors, but there is a need to take a holistic approach to employee wellbeing. To manage work related stress effectively, we need to recognise the importance and interaction of work and home problems.</p> <p>Employees do not have to be experiencing problems to use the service, as there are many positive benefits of regular engagement for lifestyle guidance. As an engagement tool the provision of the service and associated resources can assist the organisation's health and wellbeing strategies.</p>
<p>Prosperous Place</p>	<p>With stronger resilience employees, elected members and foster carers would be able to provide better service delivery. There are only positive outcomes to be gained from support colleagues and seeking assurance from Functions that action is being taken to support individuals and address trends in the current changing environment.</p>
<p>Enabling Technology</p>	<p>The use of telephone counselling, instant messaging and website information increases the speed of accessing support.</p>

<p>Design Principles of Target Operating Model</p>	
<p>Governance</p>	<p>Impact of Report</p> <p>The provision of EAS utilisation figures and trends provides an opportunity for the committee to scrutinise the provided management information. It enables what action has been taken by Function responsible line management to support individuals and address trends to be questioned. From the evidence the committee can determine if the level of assurance provided is acceptable in effectively managing health and safety.</p>

Workforce	The report provides the opportunity for the committee to ensure that trends are addressed and the health and safety management system improved. This would reduce the risk of lost resource through for example absence, enforcement action and potential claims. Early address of issues has the potential to reduce impact on employees and the wider community reducing demands on other public sector organisations.
Process Design	This can allow the committee to identify where processes are failing to address health and safety risks and improve wellbeing.
Partnerships and Alliances	This allows Trade Unions, elected members and officers to collaborate.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required
Duty of Due Regard / Fairer Scotland Duty	Not Applicable

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Employee Assistance Service – Quarterly report July 2018 – September 2018

10. APPENDICES (if applicable)

There are no appendices.

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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