

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Staff Governance Committee
DATE	22 January 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Mental Health and Wellbeing Update
REPORT NUMBER	CUS/24/022
DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Lindsay MacInnes (interim)
REPORT AUTHOR	Kirsten Foley
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.7

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on mental health and wellbeing across the organisation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

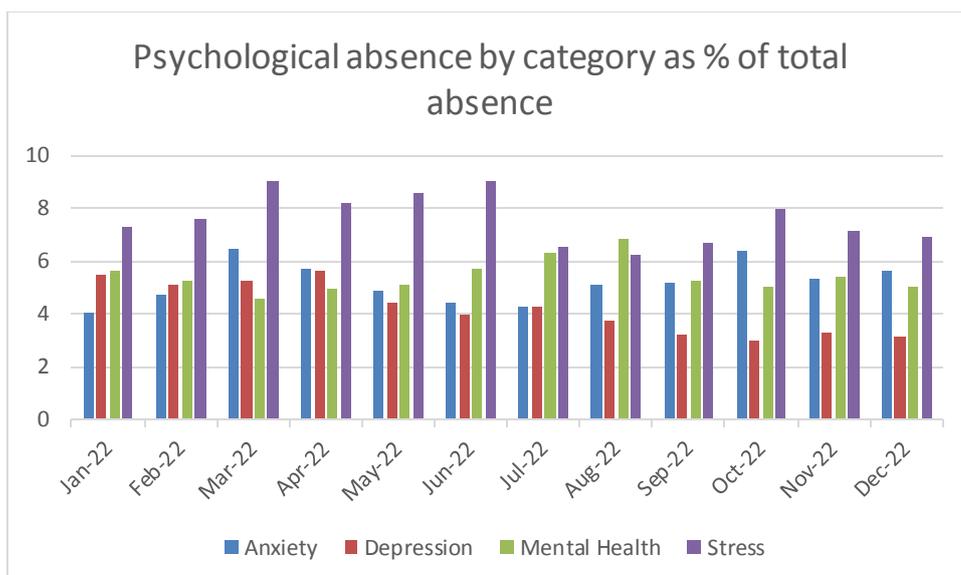
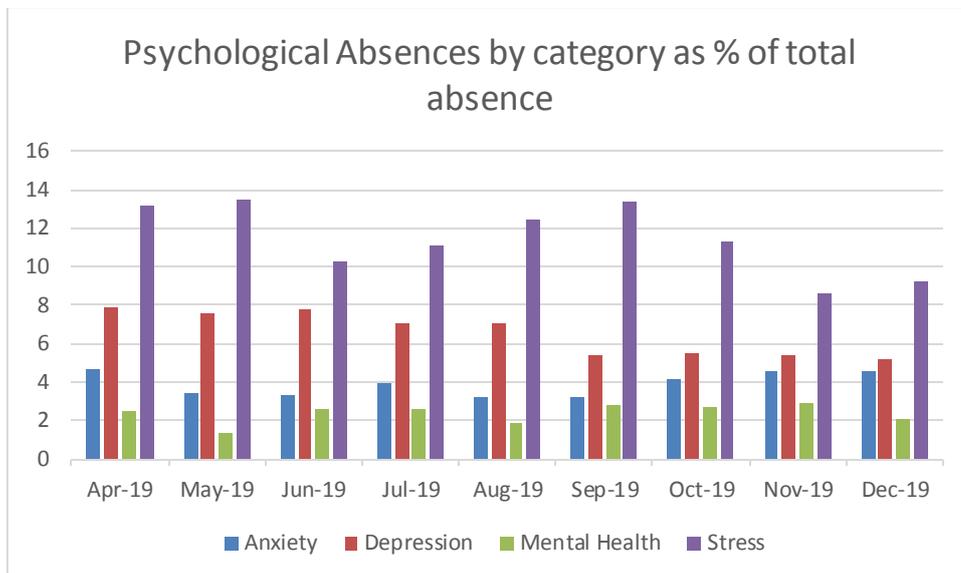
That the Committee:

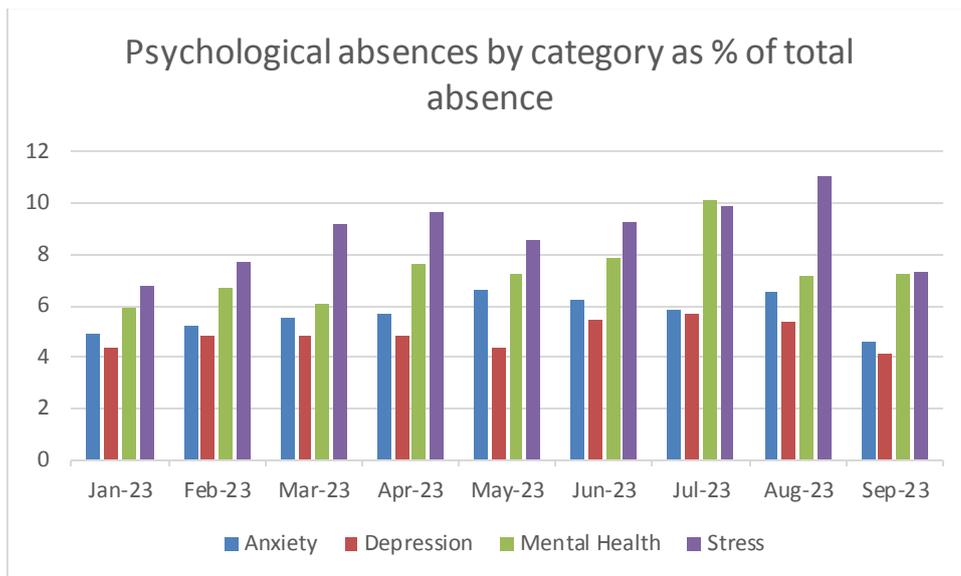
- 2.1 notes the data from the Employee Wellbeing Pulse Check and notes the support and initiatives currently available to staff;
- 2.2 instructs the interim Chief Officer – People and Organisational Development to ensure that the Wellbeing Pulse Check is repeated in the Spring of 2024 to allow the impact of interventions to be assessed; and
- 2.3 notes that a recommendation will be taken to the Extended Corporate Management Team (ECMT) on whether the Council should explore utilising the services of Salary Finance as an additional support for employees.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 The most recent Health and Safety Executive data (for 2022/23) shows that 35.2 million working days were lost in the UK over the period due to work-related ill health, with stress, anxiety and depression accounting for 17 million of these days. [Statistics - Working days lost in Great Britain \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/workingdayslost.htm)
- 3.2 Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) for the same period identified that absence levels across the UK were the highest reported since 2008, with 76% of respondents reporting that they had suffered some degree of stress-related sickness. [Employee health and wellbeing | CIPD](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/employee-health-and-wellbeing)
- 3.3 Over the same period (2022/23), psychological absences have accounted for an average of 22.5% of all absences reported each month across the Council.

3.4 The graphs below illustrate the breakdown of psychological absences by the 4 sub categories that are recorded for the periods April – Dec 2019 (to give a pre-pandemic comparison); Jan – Dec 2022 and Jan – Sept 2023 (the most recent month for which this analysis is available.)



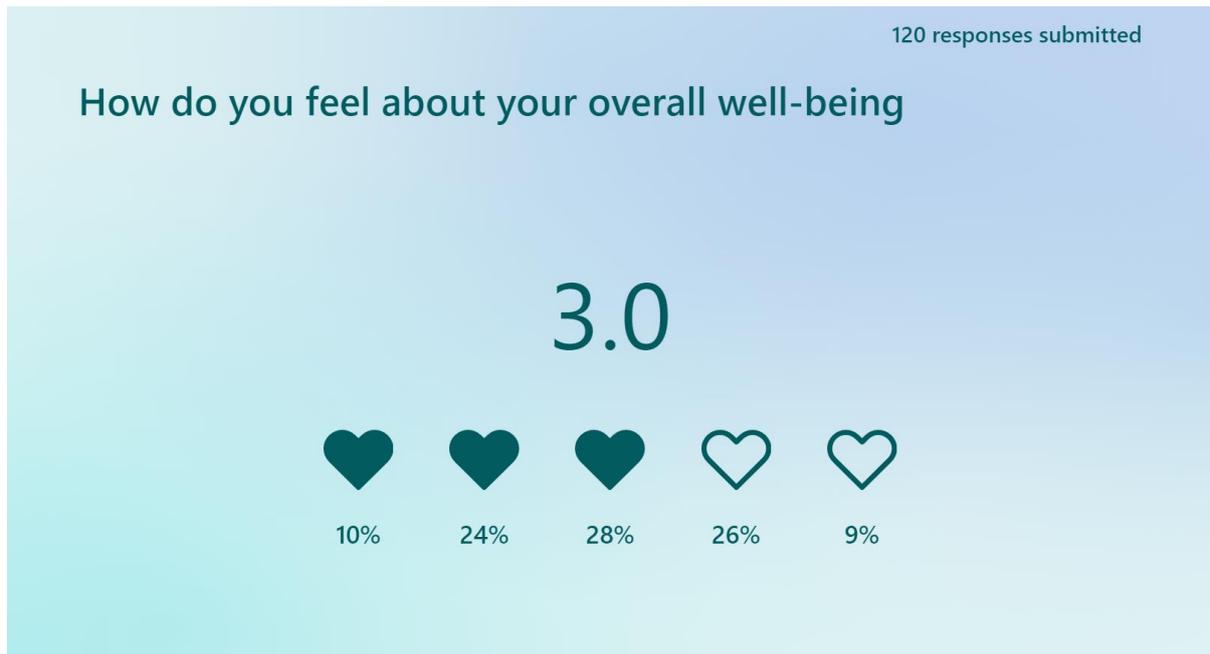


- 3.5 The graphs at 3.4 above show that the most prevalent sub category of psychological absence is stress, and this has been the case consistently across all 3 time periods. However, the figures over the past 2 years have shown a significant increase in the percentage of psychological absences which are recorded as being due to mental health conditions.
- 3.6 The reasons for the increase in absences attributed to mental health conditions could be due to an increase in the number of individuals being diagnosed as having an underlying mental health condition, and/or a greater willingness in individuals to be open regarding the reason for their absence due to a culture change around mental health issues in the workplace or a combination of the 2.
- 3.7 Sickness absence data can only provide part of the picture, however. Not all employees who are experiencing issues with their mental health and wellbeing take time away from the workplace. It is, therefore, equally important to seek to gather data regarding the mental wellbeing of employees who are attending work so that their concerns can be identified and supports put in place.

Wellbeing Pulse Check

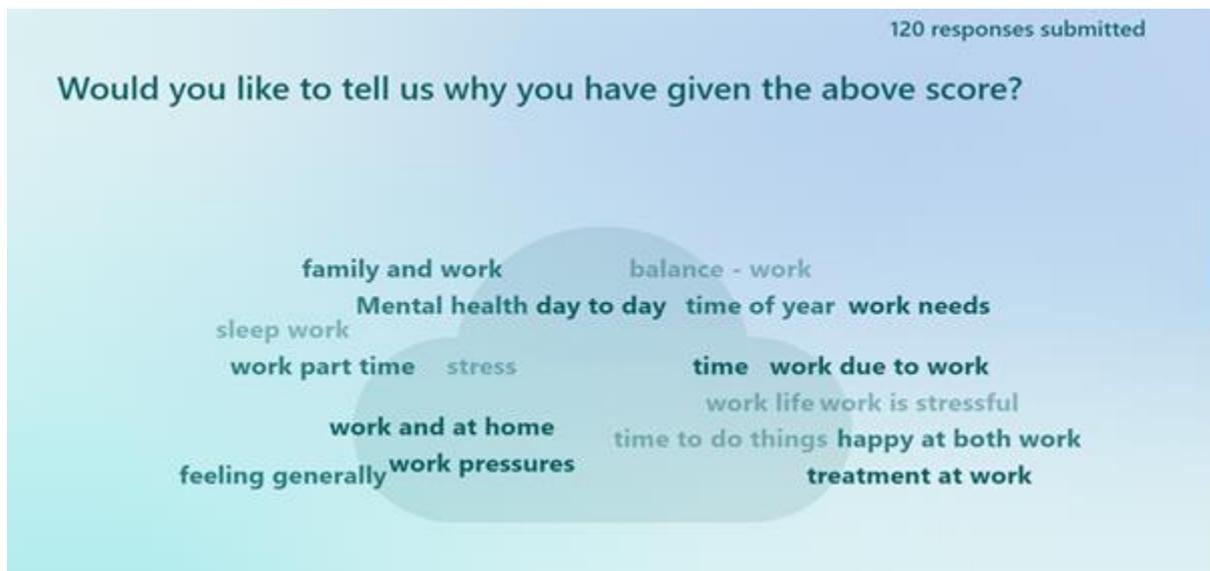
- 3.8 A wellbeing pulse check was shared on the Council intranet on November 10th 2023 [Wellbeing Pulse Check \(Page 1 of 3\) \(office.com\)](#)
- 3.9 This pulse check takes a few minutes to complete and asks employees to identify: how they feel about their mental wellbeing now and over the past 12 months, how aware they are of the support that is on offer and what they would find helpful going forward.
- 3.10 In the first month of the pulse check being open, 120 employees completed the survey.
- 3.11 The highest number of responses were recorded from Customer Experience (15%); Children's Social Work (13%) and Adult Health and Social Care (12%).

3.12 The response to the question relating to current wellbeing is shown in the graphic below.



The figures show that 28% of respondents feel neutral regarding their overall wellbeing, with 34% expressing negative feelings (scoring less than a “neutral” score of 3) relating to their overall wellbeing and 35% expressing positive feelings (scoring more than a neutral 3).

3.13 The word cloud produced from the narrative responses to why respondents had selected their answer is shown below:

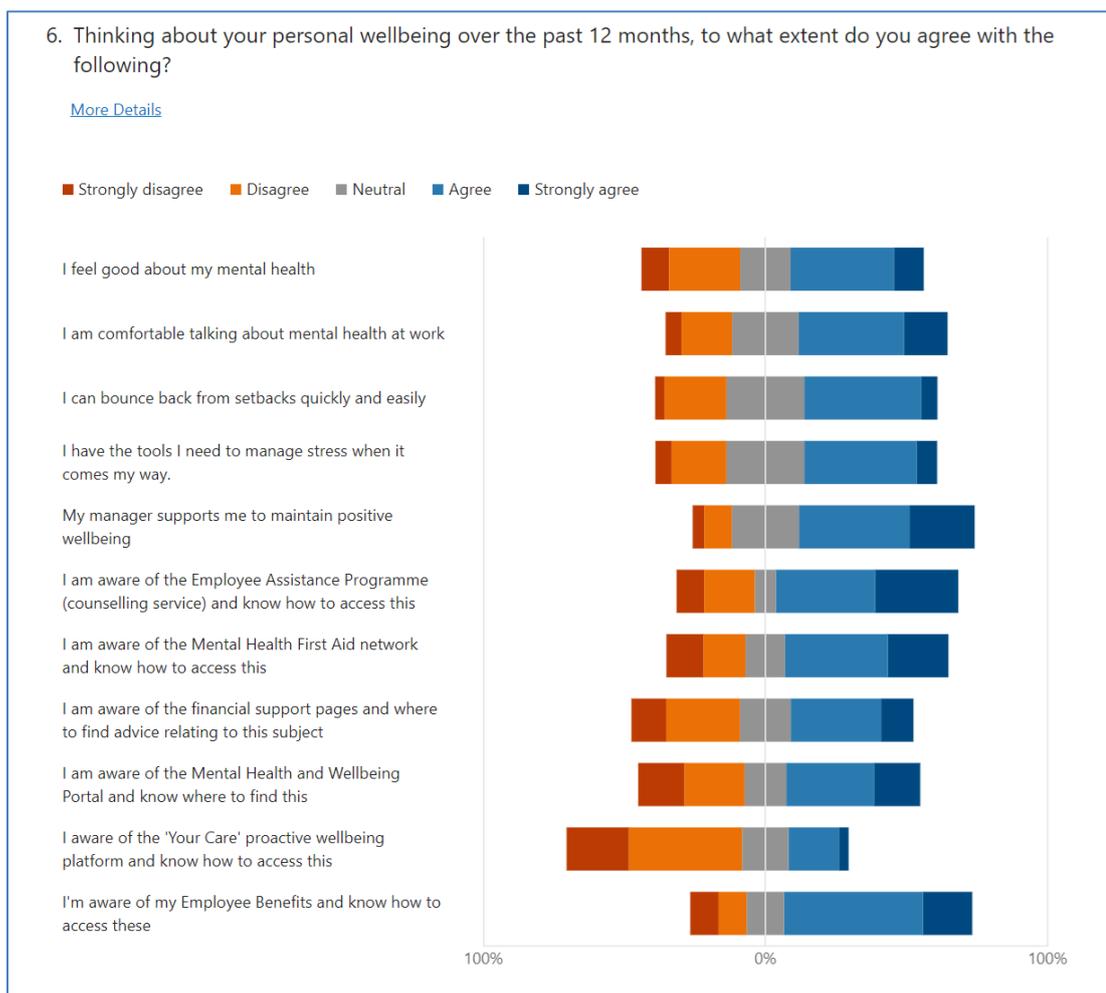


Whilst many of the responses make reference to work pressures and work/life balance, there are also responses relating to the “time of year”, which could refer to either the busy and expensive festive season and/or the long, dark days contributing to seasonal affective disorder (SAD) for some colleagues.

It is very rare that stress is purely related to a single cause, whether that be within or outwith the workplace, and we recognise that staff who are experiencing stress in their personal lives may find that stress impacting on them in the workplace also. It is for that reason that the support and resources we make available to staff through our employee assistance programme cover a very wide range of topics. It is important that employees are confident that regardless of the sources of their stress we will support both them and their immediate families; this is the reason that we make the employee assistance programme available to dependents as well as to employees.

Responses relating to “treatment at work” and ‘work pressures’, are concerning, and further analysis will be undertaken to see if support needs to be put in place. This will include providing advice to managers on how to address concerns such as work load and culture issues through one to one meetings with staff and using case work data relating to both formal and informal stages to identify any areas of the Council that may benefit from some bespoke support around culture change.

3.14 The graph below shows the extent to which employees are aware of the support that is available and feel supported around their mental wellbeing in the workplace.



- 3.15 The graph above gives some encouraging figures, with a total of 52.5% of staff agreeing/strongly agreeing that they feel comfortable talking about mental health at work; 63% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their manager supports them to maintain positive wellbeing; 66% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are aware of the Employee Assistance Programme and know how to access this and 58.4% agree or strongly agree that they are aware of the Mental Health First Aiders network and know how to access it.
- 3.16 This graph also identifies areas for improvement, however. Whilst it is encouraging that a majority of respondents are aware of the support on offer- 34% were neutral or unaware of the Employee Assistance Programme and 41.6% were neutral or unaware of the Mental Health First Aider support on offer. In addition, 62.1% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that they were aware of the 'Your Care' proactive wellbeing platform and how to access it.
- 3.17 As part of addressing the issues identified above, a poster has been developed giving full details and links to all the resources available, and to the Mental Health First Aider network. These posters will be displayed in all ACC workplaces and include a QR code so that employees can access the resources from a smart phone or a personal device should they wish. An exemplar of the poster is included at Appendix A.
- 3.18 Respondents were also asked what the Council could do or provide to assist with wellbeing, and the narrative responses are captured in the word cloud below:



- 3.19 The responses provided will be fed into reviews of manager training, flexible working and future wellbeing initiatives.

3.20 The intention is to repeat the pulse check in the spring of 2024 in order to be able to make a comparison against the current results and to gauge the effectiveness of the poster campaign and other initiatives and any changes in employee wellbeing once the winter is past.

Recent and Upcoming Initiatives.

3.21 Mental health and wellbeing can be impacted by a variety of causes, and is rarely attributable to a single cause or incident. Whilst in some instance a single life event or situation can cause stress and anxiety, for many people stress and anxiety are the result of a combination of a number of different things. [Causes of stress - Mind](#)

3.22 In recognition of this, the Mental Health and Wellbeing support pages on the Aberdeen City Council intranet provide information and links to further support on a wide range of topics, as illustrated by the screenshot of the front page below.



3.23 There is a recognised link between menopause and mental health and wellbeing. [Menopause and your mental wellbeing \(nhsinform.scot\)](#) In recognition of the fact that around 28% of the Council's workforce are women aged between 45 and 55, a decision was taken by the Staff Governance Committee to sign up to the Menopause Workplace Pledge, and the Council became signatories to the pledge in November 2022.

3.24 As signatories to the Menopause Workplace Pledge the Council has committed to a number of actions as set out below:

- Recognising that the menopause can be an issue in the workplace and women need support.
- Talking openly, positively and respectfully about the menopause.
- Actively supporting and informing employees affected by the menopause.

3.25 Aberdeen City Council is also a signatory to the Pregnancy Loss Pledge run by the Miscarriage Association in recognition of the sensitive, empathetic and on going support those experiencing such a loss require in the workplace.

- 3.26 Another recent addition to the Mental Health and Wellbeing pages on the intranet is the page entitled Men's Health. This page provides information and links to support relating to health issues affecting men, including resources to support individuals experiencing issues arising from andropause (sometime referred to as male menopause).
- 3.27 Personal wellbeing data from the Office of National Statistics has shown that, despite an initial increase in individuals assessments of their personal wellbeing when pandemic restrictions were lifted, levels have continued to fall and remain lower than they were pre pandemic. [Personal well-being in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandwellbeing/articles/personalwell-being-in-the-uk/2023-03-22)
- 3.28 Research also shows that the pandemic has led to an increase in social anxiety [The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Social Anxiety: A Systematic Review - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36811111/)
- 3.29 The impact that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, on personal wellbeing and social anxiety has led to an increase in the number of challenging situations experienced by staff working in customer facing positions. In order to support staff, work is underway to review and relaunch the zero tolerance campaign and this will be reported to a future meeting of the Staff Governance Committee.

Roadshows for Front Line Staff

- 3.30 Frontline roadshows have been rolled out across the organisation with an initial pilot taking place on October 10th at our Altens East Depot for the Waste Teams.
- 3.31 The roadshow comprised of information relating to our Employee Assistance Programme and Benefits services delivered by Vivup and as well as information relating to mental wellbeing. Physical Wellbeing Assessments were undertaken onsite by Sport Aberdeen who we have been working with to deliver a coached approach for staff to access physical exercise. A wellbeing coordinator from Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP) was also onsite to deliver information relating to healthy eating and men's health in particular. The event was also supported by our Trade Union colleagues and managers at the site. The sessions were positively received by the staff and engagement was high with many staff undertaking the activities and requesting additional information and support where required.
- 3.32 The purpose of the roadshows is to reach our frontline workforce who do not necessarily have access to the information digitally about the various supports available to them from the organisation and they ensured that all staff were left with the knowledge and confidence about how to contact these valuable services if and when they need them.
- 3.33 Further roadshows have also been delivered to colleagues across Children's services and we will continue to build on these with more planned to take place in 2024.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

- 3.34 Research undertaken by York Test in 2021 identified that 1 in 3 people in the United Kingdom suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, with the highest concentration of those affected being found in Scotland. [Mapping Seasonal Affective Disorder in the UK | yorktest](#)
- 3.35 The NHS recommend that the top 2 methods of combatting Seasonal Affective Disorder are to keep active and make the most of daylight hours. [Beating the winter blues \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)
- 3.36 A number of walking trails in the city have recently been published, and these are being promoted to staff as a resource to utilise in lunch breaks, days off or weekends. [Free walks and trails in Aberdeen | Aberdeen City Council](#)
- 3.37 Links have also been published providing information on physical and mental wellbeing during the winter months, and the links to these resources are also included in the poster that is being issued. [Looking after your mental health this winter and wellbeing pulse check \(sharepoint.com\)](#) [Winter is Coming - Keeping ourselves and our colleagues healthy this winter \(sharepoint.com\)](#). Further information on looking after yourself during the winter can be found on our employee wellbeing portal 'Your Care' with top tips and suggestions on how to look after yourself during this time.
- These links contain specific advice relating to seasonal affective disorder, including signposting to the MIND resources on this topic [What is seasonal affective disorder \(SAD\)? - Mind](#), and a link to a podcast provided by our Employee Assistance Programme [Seasonal Affective Disorder - EAP Podcasts on Vimeo](#)

Financial Wellbeing

- 3.38 The Money and Mental Health Policy Institute has identified links between financial problems and mental health. According to their research, 46% of people who are experiencing problem debt also suffer from mental health problems, with 86% of these individuals identifying that their mental health had suffered a further negative impact from their financial problems. [Money and mental health facts and statistics](#)
- 3.39 The research also showed that people who are experiencing mental health issues are three and a half times more likely to experience financial problems as a result of their mental health condition. This cycle is illustrated in the graphic below:



- 3.40 A range of advice and support relating to financial wellbeing is already available via Council services and Employee Assistance. [Financial Wellbeing – Cost of Living Support \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- 3.41 In addition to the support already available, we are currently exploring the services offered by Salary Finance, a company already working with public sector partners across Scotland including Aberdeenshire, Fife, East Renfrewshire, Argyll and Bute and Falkirk Councils, Edinburgh University, Edinburgh Napier University, Glasgow University and Scottish Fire and Rescue.
- 3.42 The Salary Finance platform is built around providing financial education and tailored financial solutions including payroll deducted savings, affordable borrowing and salary advance.
- 3.43 Once a full appraisal of the Salary Finance offer has been completed, including a presentation to Trade Union colleagues, a recommendation will be taken to ECMT on whether or not this is a service that Aberdeen City Council should consider adding to the support already in place for staff.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The biggest financial cost to the Council in relation to wellbeing of staff is in relation to occupational sick pay, provision of supply cover where this is required and the loss of productivity through absence.
- 4.2 Providing support to employees to maintain their wellbeing will minimise the cost of sickness absence.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council has a duty of care to employees under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and responsibilities to employees under the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.2 Providing support to employees around their wellbeing assists the Council's discharge its legal duties under these Acts.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	No significant risks identified			N/A
Compliance	Failure to provide appropriate support for employees who are experiencing issues with mental wellbeing could conflict with the council's duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974	Management support and training Provision of support to employees including occupational health, employee assistance and signposting to partner services.	L	Yes
Operational	Absence levels resulting from mental health and wellbeing can impact on service delivery. Employees who are experiencing mental health issues can suffer a temporary decrease in their standard of performance, thus putting service delivery at risk.	Management support and training Provision of support to employees including occupational health, employee assistance and signposting to partner services.	M	Yes
Financial	Cost of occupational sick pay for employees who are off sick.	Management support and training Provision of support to employees including	M	Yes

		occupational health, employee assistance and signposting to partner services.		
Reputational	The provision of high levels of support for employees who are experiencing mental health issues will enhance the council's reputation as an employer of choice	Management support and training Provision of support to employees including occupational health, employee assistance and signposting to partner services.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No significant risks identified			N/A

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The provisions of this report support the Partnership commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to improve quality of life and support people with the cost of living • to recognise that the Council depends upon its staff to deliver the services it provides and believe the Council must properly reward, train and support its staff.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-26</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals within this report support stretch outcome number 1. <i>No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026.</i></p> <p>The link between mental wellbeing and financial issues is well researched and documented. Adopting a holistic approach to supporting the wellbeing of employees, by focusing not simply on physical and mental wellbeing, but also on financial wellbeing, will assist with the achievement of this stretch outcome.</p>
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	<p>The proposals within this report support stretch outcome 11. <i>Healthy life expectancy (time lived in good health) is five years longer by 2026</i></p> <p>By ensuring that support is in place to support employees who are experiencing issues with their wellbeing, the Council is increasing the healthy life expectancy of staff.</p>

Regional and City Strategies	
Workforce Plan	As set out in the Workforce Plan, the emphasis on developing internal capacity and the need for flexibility and efficiency in our reducing workforce, there is a need to focus on supporting employee health and wellbeing.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Stage 1 assessment completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 [Statistics - Working days lost in Great Britain \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/working-days-lost-in-great-britain/)

10.2 [Employee health and wellbeing | CIPD](#)

10.3 [Mapping Seasonal Affective Disorder in the UK | yorktest](#)

10.4 [Beating the winter blues \(nhsinform.scot\)](#)

10.5 [Money and mental health facts and statistics](#)

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix A – Mental Health and Wellbeing Support at ACC poster

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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Mental Health and Wellbeing Support at ACC

Find quick links easily below for some of our key support services.

Employee Assistance Programme (Counselling Service and Domestic Abuse Support)

**Anxiety | Bereavement | Stress | Depression | Workplace Issues
Trauma | Relationships | Finances | Addiction | Family Difficulties**

For all employees: <https://vivup.tercltd.co.uk/?CODE=107809>

For teachers: <https://vivup.tercltd.co.uk/?CODE=107810>

Other Support Services and Resources available:



Mental Health First Aider Network: <https://shorturl.at/qxDM8>

'Your Care 'Portal: <https://shorturl.at/jpOU7>

Self-Help Workbooks: <https://shorturl.at/iHO15>

Mental Health & Wellbeing on the Intranet: <https://shorturl.at/eopG7>

Join in with all the latest chat and initiatives on our Mental Health and Wellbeing  Yammer channel: <https://shorturl.at/eIOSZ>



If you need anything else, please contact flindsay@aberdeencity.gov.uk who will be happy to help you find the right support!



HEALTH
WELLBEING
HAPPINESS



Aberdeen City
Health & Social Care
Partnership

Working partnerships