

MENTAL HEALTH TASK GROUP

15 July 2019

Present: Councillor G Saffery (Chair)
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, A Grimston, R Martins and
B Mauthoor

Officers: Democratic Services Officer

7 Apologies for absence

There were none.

8 Disclosures of interest

There were none.

9 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2019 were approved.

10 Role of the mental health champion

Watford Borough Council's Mental Health Champion, Councillor Rabi Martins, explained that he had been appointed by Mayor Thornhill in 2013/14.

Officer support had been provided by the Community and Environmental Services directorate and progress had been made to define the Mental Health Champion's role and objectives:

1. To promote and drive the mental health and wellbeing agenda within the council through the Mayor, Portfolio Holders and strategic leadership team
2. To engage with and support voluntary sector groups providing mental health support in the community e.g., Guideposts, Signpost and New Hope
3. To encourage local businesses to adopt mental health friendly policies

1. To learn and share best practice with other authorities, particularly across Hertfordshire.

It had been decided to progress the first of these objectives initially i.e., promoting mental health and wellbeing within the council, before engaging externally. This would enable best practice to be established which could then be shared more widely. To date, the council had taken the following steps led by the Mayor, Mental Health Champion and officers:

- **Time to Change pledge** – In December 2018, Watford Borough Council had joined 900 organisations in England (across all sectors) to sign a pledge which committed the authority to promote and manage mental health wellbeing amongst staff and to tackle the stigma attached to mental health.
- **Relaunching the relevant health and wellbeing pages on the council's intranet** – A dedicated area on the intranet entitled “Watford Health and You” had brought together information for staff about health and lifestyle, mental health and the Time to Change pledge.
- **Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA)** – 12 members of staff had trained as Mental Health First Aiders for the council. The accredited course enabled them to act as a first point of contact for colleagues seeking help.
- **Mental Health & You Champions** – A dedicated group of individuals had been established to help drive the council's pledge, including through organising and supporting activities that helped people change the way they thought and acted about mental health. Joint meetings were held regularly with employee champions from Three Rivers District Council.
- **Learning and personal development** – Ad hoc training had been organised for staff on mental health and wellbeing issues.

It was also noted that council staff had access to an independent employee assistance programme WorkplaceWellness, providing confidential counselling and advice.

During subsequent discussions, the following points were raised:

- A formal role profile should be agreed for Watford's Mental Health Champion to maintain focus and direction. It was suggested that the Mayoral appointment should be for a period of four years, and could be renewable. In addition to providing dedicated officer support, consideration should be given to attaching a small budget to the role.
- 120 local authorities had signed the Time to Change pledge, including five in Hertfordshire (Watford, Three Rivers, St Albans, Dacorum, and Broxborne).
- It was important to consider mental health and wellbeing together.
- The Mental Health Champion should play an important part in bringing together relevant mental health organisations in an informal forum to discuss common issues.
- A small team of deputies (two or three) to the Mental Health Champion could be established who would each support initiatives for a particular interest group e.g., the elderly, ethnic groups or council employees.
- Further and ongoing training should be provided for councillors on mental health awareness to assist them in their work in the community (an initial training had been provided in October 2017).
- Discussions were being held with Watford and West Herts Chamber of Commerce to promote mental health and wellbeing in business – an event was planned in October/November to kick start this initiative.
- It was recognised that there was a wealth of activity in local schools to support students and young people with their mental health. The Health and Wellbeing Forum should invite representatives from a range of schools to present on this and to investigate how the council could help and support.
- It would be useful to devise a meaningful measure (KPI) of performance and success in tackling mental health and wellbeing amongst council staff. This should be monitored by the Health & Wellbeing Forum.

11 **Date of the next meeting**

- Tuesday 17 September – to analyse the survey results and agree the task group’s recommendations.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.30 pm
and finished at 7.25 pm