

10 June 2024**WELLBEING DASHBOARD****Purpose**

1. To update the Forestry Commission Executive Board on progress in the area of staff wellbeing and to accompany the slides, which will be presented at the meeting.

Background

2. The wellbeing dashboard aims to highlight some of the activities carried out by the Diversity and Wellbeing team during Q4 and Q1. It also contains some key insights with regards to the usage of the occupational health service and the employee assistance programme (EAP) for the last financial year, and sickness absence trends between January 2023 – March 2024 (15 months).

Diversity and Wellbeing highlights (slide 2)

3. Some of the activities carried out to promote staff wellbeing include:
 - FC-wide Wellbeing Action Plan, which brings together the strategic priorities for wellbeing over the next 18 months.
 - Wellbeing communications focused on two key campaigns: Stress Awareness Month (April) and Mental Health Awareness Week (May). Communications received positive engagement and led to a discussion promoting the use of key wellbeing tools, i.e. stress risk assessments. Mental Health Awareness Week highlighted the importance of movement for mental health and many colleagues shared their intention to take part in Defra Sports Day.
 - Diversity communications focused on International Women's Day, Ramadan, Autism Awareness Month, Deaf Awareness Week and other topics, which have all been well received.
 - Various webinars have taken place on topics such as financial wellbeing, sleep, the mental health benefits of movement and creating an inclusive work environment.
 - The FC Wellbeing Advisor has been establishing links with district teams and supporting colleagues, including running a team-building wellbeing activity at the NGR Team Away Day.
 - Work has been undertaken to make improvements to the Occupational Health service and EAP. The EAP provider has also been briefed about the Securing the Future programme in anticipation of increased calls from FE colleagues as a result of it, ensuring that adequate support is in place.
 - The FC Diversity and Wellbeing Manager has attended EDI events including International Women's Day celebrations at Amazon HQ, a Civil Service panel event at the US Embassy and the Staff Networks Day Conference along with the Chair of Rainbow Canopy.
 - 'Out in the Forest' guided walks are planned at several forests starting in Pride month in June and all the way to August.
 - The Government has published the [Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Expenditure Guidance](#) and [Guidance on Diversity and Inclusion and Impartiality for Civil Servants](#). The FC is in a good position and can carry on as normal for the most part as our EDI approach is in line with the guidance.

Occupational Health management referrals (May 2023 - April 24) (Slide 3-4)

4. Management referrals to Occupational Health are shown by division for each month and we can see that April 2024 shows the highest number of referrals since July 2023. The total number of referrals was 129, which is higher than in the previous year (2022/23) in which there were 101 referrals. Neurodiversity referrals have also increased significantly from 6 in 2022/23 to 16 in 2023/24. In response to this we are promoting greater awareness of Neurodiversity through our Disability, Neurodivergence and Carers staff network and promoting webinars by Defra for managers and staff.

5. Slide 4 slide breaks down the management referrals by disease code and the work related outcome for the same period. We can see that 63% of management referral outcomes were not work related.
6. The top 10 disease outcomes for management referrals are listed with anxiety and cardiovascular & cerebro-vascular overtaking back pain and other limb disorders.
7. Work related stress is being addressed in collaboration with the Health and Safety team and will be a focus of the Wellbeing Action Plan over the next 18 months.
8. The other outcomes will also be addressed by the Wellbeing Action Plan, in particular, physical wellbeing and healthy ways of working will be promoted, for example, walking meetings, more standing desks, increased movement and stretching.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) (slide 5)

9. Anxiety remains the most common reason for counselling calls in Forest Services/Commissioners' Office and in Forestry England, while low mood is most common in Forest Research.
10. Advice call themes are more varied across the divisions but childcare, employment and wills and probate continue to be among the most common.
11. Staff continue to be educated on the range of support available via the intranet, staff newsletters, and through word of mouth via Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health First Aiders.

Sickness absence and working days lost (slides 6-9)

12. Slide 6 looks at the total working days lost across the organisation by absence duration, i.e. long term or short term. The data relates to instances of sickness absence, which may be for one day or more than one day at a time for the last calendar year. Short term is defined by absences of less than 28 calendar days. Long term is defined as absences of 28 calendar days or more in a single absence period.
13. Absences were highest between October 2023 and February 2024, which is similar to the previous year. However, it should be noted that figures for January and February 2024 are significantly higher than in 2023.
14. Slide 7 shows the total working days lost broken down by absence type, as well as the number of days attributed to poor mental health. The number of working days lost due to mental health more than doubled in January and February 2024 compared to 2023. This could be due to a number of factors such as recruitment freezes and uncertainty of the pay award. This is also part of a national trend as CIPD recently revealed that [poor mental health is costing the UK economy £51bn a year](#). However, given the recent news on Securing the Future and increased funding from Defra, staff may feel more settled and it is hoped that subsequent months will show a more positive picture.
15. It should be noted that mental health becomes a greater cause of working days lost over spring/summer and in anticipation of this trend re-emerging, the Wellbeing Action Plan communications have been scheduled for June. The winter months see a higher number of short term absences, which may be attributed to cold and flu viruses. This highlights the importance of continuing to offer the flu vaccine and to run winter wellbeing campaigns during the winter months.
16. Slide 8 shows the payroll cost of lost working days per full time equivalent post by each division. Given the cost to the business, our aim will be to increase the data we have available with regards to sickness absences i.e. to identify whether some pay bands take more sick days than others. This will enable us to adopt a more targeted approach to reducing sickness absence.

17. Slide 9 shows the total payroll cost for the whole organisation by absence type (short term and long term). This shows that short term absences have a greater impact on payroll costs and highlights the importance of taking measures to reducing short term absences.

Conclusion

18. The Executive Board are invited to ask any questions related to the presentation or the accompanying paper. Any further information relating to a specific area/profession or team may be requested from the Diversity and Wellbeing team.

Diversity and Wellbeing Manager
29 May 2024