

## **The Vale of Glamorgan Council**

### **Cabinet Meeting: 22 February, 2016**

#### **Report of the Leader**

### **Procurement of an Employee Assistance Programme**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To ask Cabinet to note and endorse the procurement of an Employee Assistance Programme for use by all Council's employees from 1st June 2016.

#### **Recommendation**

1. To note and endorse the procurement of a counselling, advice and support service for Council employees via a direct award to Care First with effect from 1st June 2016.

#### **Reason for the Recommendation**

1. To support the Council's approach to the management of sickness absence across all service areas and the complementary approach to employee engagement.

#### **Background**

2. Members will be aware of the Council's increasing focus on staff engagement and attendance management over the last 12 months. The positive engagement, attendance and, ultimately performance of our workforce becomes ever more important as we respond to increasing financial constraints.
3. The staff engagement strategy began in June 2015 as a key part of the Council's Reshaping Services Programme and is now helping us to refine and improve approaches to issues such as internal communications, training and development and the continued involvement and engagement of our employees.
4. Over the same period improvements have been made to the Council's approach to the management of sickness absence, and in particular the robustness, regularity and focus of the performance management arrangements. It is anticipated that absence rates will fall below the corporate target of 9.00 days per employee at the end of 2015/16 and remain one of the best rates across Councils in Wales.
5. At the same time, however, there is an increasing awareness of the small, but nonetheless important increase in stress related absence within the workforce. Stress related absence, whether home or work related currently accounts for 32% of all absence, compared with 31% in 2014/15.

6. The increase in such absence is perhaps understandable given the current pace of change and challenge within the Council and is certainly in line with a similar increase across the wider public sector. The HSE reported stress related absence as forming 35% of all absence in 2014/15. It is important, however that we continue to respond to this increase as part of a commitment to the wellbeing of our workforce.
7. Members will be aware of the Council's current approaches to managing stress related absence including the policy of immediate referral to occupational health, the conducting of risk assessments and the use of outsourced counselling services. The funding of counselling has increased from £20k to £40k over the last 2 years.
8. As part of the continuing response to the above it is now proposed to procure an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for access by all Council employees. This will provide a tangible benefit for all staff, help to improve attendance and be complementary to the Council's approach to staff engagement.

### **Relevant Issues and Options**

9. In accordance with the above it is proposed to procure the EAP services from Care First with effect from 1st June 2016. The services are offered as part of the National Procurement Services Framework Agreement and as such will not require the Council to progress a wider and competitive procurement exercise.
10. Care First are also the sole provider of the service under LOT 2A of the Framework Agreement and can therefore be procured under a direct award arrangement.
11. The service is currently used by six other local authorities including Cardiff, Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Torfaen and Conway Councils. Reports from these Councils have been sourced and are all encouraging.
12. The main elements of the service are set out below:-
  - The provision of telephone counselling services for employees on a 24/7 basis for 365 days per year and through immediate access to a team of counsellors accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).
  - Whilst the above is mainly a telephone service it is important to stress that face to face counselling can subsequently be offered subject to clinical assessment and clinical need. The service is offered regardless of whether the issue is work or home related and can be accessed immediately and at the convenience of the employee.
  - The provision of a general telephone information and advice service for employees available between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm Monday to Friday. This service is offered through a separate team of information specialists and can include, for example, advice on a spectrum of issues including debt management, divorce, benefits, and child care issues. Such issues can often be a precursor to stress and subsequent sickness absence. Access to this service will therefore have significant benefits.
  - The provision for the above services to be accessed by managers to seek advice and support on health and sickness issues relating to their own staff. This will be enormously beneficial and would help complement current Occupational Health and Human Resource Services.
  - The provision of an online and interactive Website and mobile app (Zest) as a personalised health and personal fitness portal including advice on exercise, weight, diet and general health issues. As indicated this can be customised for individual employees and used to monitor and incentivise health improvements.

- The provision of an online resource (Lifestyle) containing regular information, advice and articles on general "life" issues ranging from relationships, childcare and consumer rights, through to stress, health and fitness. This will complement the work of the Council's Occupational Health Unit and help to support regular "positive health promotion" events.
  - Other aspects of the service include the provision of regular management information on the use of the EAP by service area and content. This again would be helpful in refining the Council's Occupational Health and Safety strategy and ensuring the relevance of related interventions.
13. A more detailed summary of the services from the Care First EAP are set out at [Appendix A](#).
  14. The cost of the service (as part of the NPS Framework) is currently £2.02 per employee which will mean an annual cost of approximately £11,000. This figure is based on the total employee headcount across the Council including schools.
  15. The cost will reduce to £1.78 per employee once the total client base for the service across all organisations under the Welsh Framework Agreement in Wales reaches 60,000 employees. This will mean a reduced annual cost of approximately £9,000.
  16. It is intended that the service will replace the Council's current counselling service as currently provided through a contract with Cardiff Council. If the recommendations within this report are endorsed then the current provision will be terminated following the issuing of 3 months' notice as per the requirements of the contract.
  17. Based on the costs as set out in paragraphs 14 and 15 above it is clear that the procurement of the EAP service will help contribute to the Council's wider savings targets as well as providing a service to all Council employees (rather than those who only have need to access the current counselling services).
  18. Members will be aware that the procurement of the service falls within the delegated authority of the Head of Human Resources. The endorsement of Cabinet is however sought given the importance of the Council's attendance and staff engagement strategies.
  19. It is intended that the service will be procured on a three year contract (from the 1st July 2016) and will be reviewed closely during that period.

### **Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)**

20. The resource implications are set out in paragraphs 14 to 16 above.

### **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

21. There are no sustainability and climate change implications arising as a result of this report.

### **Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)**

21. It will be necessary to enter into a form of contract with Care First to ensure clarity about terms and mutual expectations.

### **Crime and Disorder Implications**

22. There are no crime and disorder implications arising as a result of this report.

## **Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)**

23 The above initiative will ensure that a EAP service is available for all employees and accessible on a 24 hour, 365 day a year basis.

## **Corporate/Service Objectives**

24 The procurement of the service will help to support service delivery and the meeting of corporate/service objectives.

## **Policy Framework and Budget**

25 The noting and endorsement of this report is a matter for Executive decision.

## **Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)**

26 The Trade Unions have been consulted on this issue and are supportive of the procurement of the service.

## **Relevant Scrutiny Committee**

27 Corporate Resources.

## **Background Papers**

None

## **Contact Officer:**

Reuben Bergman - Head of Human Resources

## **Officers Consulted:**

Corporate Management Team  
Rosalie Malcolm - Policy Officer (Procurement)  
Mike Walsh - Principal Lawyer  
Andrea Davies - Corporate Health and Safety Manager  
Nicola Johns - Occupational Health Nurse Manager

## **Responsible Officer:**

Rob Thomas - Managing Director