



LOCAL GOVERNMENT MENTAL HEALTH AND STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN WELLBEING 2020 - 2023



HEALING TAKES TIME, AND ASKING FOR HELP IS A COURAGEOUS STEP.”

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FOREWORD

& Introduction

Welcome to the Local Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which has been developed to provide a co-ordinated approach to the provision and delivery of Mental Health and Wellbeing initiatives, to ensure that the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group can deliver against key priorities and to promote positive mental health for all in local government.

The purpose of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group is to share best practice and to work in partnership to improve the wellbeing of everyone, upskill line managers, raise awareness, challenge mental health stigma and contribute to cultures that support attendance and improve understanding.

This Strategy has been developed to guide the work of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group in the longer term, and to focus on the action plan for 2020 - 2023. It was developed following consultation with members of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group, the groups which the members represent, and other stakeholders.

In focussing on these activities, continuing to work with our stakeholders and responding to their needs, the Group aims to support and assist individuals in Councils and the NIHE to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and to support Councils and the NIHE to implement their own health and wellbeing initiatives.

This will be done by working in partnership with Councils and the NIHE and other key stakeholders and established campaigns e.g. 'Take 5 Steps to Well-Being', the ECNI Mental Health Charter and INSPIRE Mental Health:



- To support cross-sectoral initiatives.
- To pilot new regional mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- To provide training and development initiatives.
- To showcase best practice.
- To demonstrate improvement in levels of mental health across councils and the NIHE. e.g. resilience; support services and mental health awareness.
- To work in partnership with elected members, local government officers, the wider public sector and the voluntary and community sector to promote positive mental health initiatives.

Anne Donaghy
Chair of the Local Government
Health and Wellbeing Group



ACCEPT * SUPPORT * KNOWLEDGE

CONTEXT

This Strategy recognises that the staff in local government are our best asset and it aims to protect and promote their health and wellbeing and those of their families. The last few months have been very challenging for everyone as local government and individuals have responded to the pandemic and lockdown. As we move to a new normal, it is more important than ever to work together as a sector to protect our mental health and wellbeing.

In 2018, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that poor mental health was the most common cause of long-term sickness absence in UK workplaces and that stress-related absence had increased in nearly two-fifths of organisations (CIPD 2018), while a Mind survey found that one in ten employees rated their current mental health as poor or very poor. Of these, 26% said this was due to problems at work and a further half said it was due to a combination of problems at work and outside of work; 40% said they had taken time off as a result.

Mental health is still the *'elephant in the room'* in most workplaces - employees are reluctant to raise the subject, for fear of discrimination, while managers often shy away from the subject, for fear of making matters worse or provoking legal consequences. This culture of silence means undetected mental health issues can spiral into a crisis, resulting in sickness absence, higher levels of presenteeism and increased staff turnover.

The CIPD identified disclosure as one of the biggest barriers, creating a 'vicious

circle' for both employees and employers. The CIPD found that more than four in ten (43%) employees would not feel comfortable disclosing unmanageable stress or poor mental health to their employer or manager (CIPD 2016). A Mind survey found many employees did not feel comfortable disclosing their mental health problem, worrying that their employer will think they can't do their job and that they would be treated differently. Many people are also reluctant to speak up about their mental health because it could harm their promotion and career opportunities.

One of the issues raised during our consultation process was the difficulty of disclosing stress and poor mental health to an employer, and the need to remove stigma by moving towards a culture where mental health can be discussed openly by individuals in Councils and the NIHE. This Strategy seeks to address these issues by working together across the local government sector.



SCOPE

The Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group was formed in 2019 and has held 2 stakeholder events in November 2019 and January 2020, in partnership with Inspire, which have contributed to the development of this strategy.

The membership of the Working Group is drawn from stakeholder bodies across

the local government sector and includes representatives from PPMA, trade unions, NILGA and external stakeholders such as the ECNI, LRA, HSENI, and the EA. The Chair of the Working Group was nominated by SOLACE and is Anne Donaghy, Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim District Council.

The current membership comprises:

Chair (SOLACE)	Anne Donaghy, Chief Executive, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Jennifer Close
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Gillian Arthur, Jennifer Parkinson
Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	Aisling Knipe
Belfast City Council	Catherine Christy
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	Karen Mailey
Department for Communities	Simon Sloan
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Mary McLaughlin
Equality Commission for NI	Patrice Hardy
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Carla Rice
GMB	Alan Perry
Health and Safety Executive NI	Claire Kelly, Alison Martin
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	Sarah-Jane Smyth
Local Government Staff Commission	Helen Hall, Lorna Parsons, Patricia Murray
Labour Relations Agency	Paul Lowe
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	Gillian Forster
Northern Ireland Housing Executive	Katie Dowds, Frank McGuigan, Louise Henry
Northern Ireland Local Government Association	Diane Anderson
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance	Terry Thomas
UNITE the Union	Gareth Scott

SCOPE

The work of the Group is supported by Commission officers, and they also provide a secretariat service at meetings. The membership of the Group will be reviewed on a regular basis and additional members may be invited to join the Group to provide expertise, as required.

The first meeting of the Group was held on 25th November 2019 and was a workshop, facilitated by an external facilitator who helped the Group to establish their priorities and an action plan.

A follow-up best practice and consultation event was held in January 2020 with a range of external speakers to share best practice examples, including Thames Water and the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust.



FEEDBACK

Mechanisms

Progress on the Strategy will be:

- *Provided to members of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group at their meetings.*
- *A copy of the minutes of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group meetings will be included on the Staff Commission meeting agendas for information.*
- *An update on the work of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group will be included on the Solace meeting agendas for information.*
- *Updates will be sent to Councils and the NIHE through the Local Government Staff Commission E-zine.*
- *Members will report back to, and seek feedback from, the stakeholder groups they represent:*

Our priorities include actions to help achieve the Draft Programme for Government 2016 - 2021 targets including:

**Outcome 4:
We enjoy long, healthy and active lives**

**Outcome 8:
We care for others and help those in need**



OPPORTUNITIES

Regional Mental Health

Mental illness is a major public health issue in NI and is the single largest cause of ill health disability. NI has higher levels of mental ill health than any other region in the UK and 1 in 5 adults here have a mental condition at any one time, which is over 25% higher overall prevalence of mental illness in England.²



The NI Executive are committed to tackling the mental health crisis facing Northern Ireland and have established an Executive Sub Committee on mental health.

Changing Workplaces

Working environments are constantly changing. Employers find there is a need to restructure and make redundancies, or change working conditions or contracts. Any change process is a challenge for people's mental health. Putting mechanisms in place to balance some of the stressful aspects of this process is important. The Group will use the Regional Strategy to co-ordinate mental health and wellbeing initiatives across Councils and the NIHE, and to work in partnership with external stakeholders to support individuals through these changes.

² *Making Life Better, DHSSPS (2018)*

³ *Mental Health in NI, Dr J Betts and Dr J Thompson (2017)*

Stigma

In Northern Ireland, stigma is still a major deterrent to seeking help for mental illness. Research found that internalised stigma (holding stigmatised views about oneself), and treatment stigma (stigma associated with seeking or receiving treatment for mental illness), were the main factors in not seeking help.³ The Group hope to address this stigma through the 'ASK' branding, campaign and associated education programme.

Challenging Economic Climate

The impact of the coronavirus has resulted in a very challenging economic climate which will mean budgetary and funding challenges for Councils and the NIHE. The Strategy will help Councils and the NIHE to work together on mental health and wellbeing initiatives across the sector, and in partnership with external stakeholders.

Future of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group

The Commission currently co-ordinates the work of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group and acts as secretariat to the Group. When the Commission is dissolved in March 2021, this work will be undertaken by another local government body.

OUR VISION

The vision of the Local Government Health and Wellbeing Group is to increase awareness of mental health and wellbeing and decrease the stigma around poor mental health and...

ASK

ACCEPT * SUPPORT * KNOWLEDGE

IS EVERYTHING OK?

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP?

IS THERE ANY SUPPORT YOU NEED?

CAN YOU HELP?

CAN WE DO THIS TOGETHER?

CAN YOU HELP ME TO GET HELP?



ASK

ACCEPT * SUPPORT * KNOWLEDGE

OUR VISION

ACCEPT

One of the key messages to come out of the consultation was the need to accept that anyone at any level in Councils and the NIHE can have poor mental health, and to work towards a culture where mental health can be discussed openly. As organisations, we need to demonstrate a visible commitment to mental health in the workplace by providing an environment where individuals feel accepted and safe to speak openly about mental health including their personal experiences.

SUPPORT

The Group seeks to ensure that individuals in Councils and the NIHE feel supported in relation to their health and wellbeing and that, if they are experiencing poor mental health, they know how and where to access support.

KNOWLEDGE

Mental health is about wellness rather than illness and is not merely the absence of a mental health condition. Mental health exists on a continuum, or range: from positive, healthy functioning at one end through to severe symptoms of mental health conditions at the other.

The Group seeks to support individuals at all levels in Councils and the NIHE to have access to the knowledge and tools to support anyone experiencing poor mental health, and create healthy workplaces.



PRIORITIES

- Promote and support Councils and the NIHE to use a measurement tool to carry out an assessment of mental health within their organisations, for example the HSE NI Management Standards.
- Promote the Local Government Training Group and other providers (for example, Inspire, PHA, HSE NI) courses to raise awareness, and provide tools for managers, elected members and employees, including:
 - *Webinar/eLearning on mental health awareness.*
 - *Training for line managers to have conversations around mental health.*
 - *Develop leadership and people management skills to ensure leaders at all levels across the organisation have the confidence to have conversations around mental health.*
 - *Delivery of mental health first aid training.*
 - *Training for Mental Health Champions.*
 - *Training to 'know what to do in a crisis', ensuring individuals are clear on where to go to get support in a crisis.*
- Promote lived experience examples from people who have experienced poor mental health by including them in the Ezine and seminars/webinars.
- Promote the ECNI Mental Health Charter and the Mind 'Time to Change' Pledge for Councils and the NIHE to sign to indicate their commitment to the campaigns.
- Launch a dedicated week of mental health activities to coincide with Mental Health Week to help raise awareness.
- Promote the 'ASK' brand across Councils and NIHE.
- Promote and signpost information, training, engagement forums and tools for all individuals in Councils and the NIHE.
- Promote the Here2Help App to ensure that individuals in councils, NIHE and other stakeholders have downloaded it, and know where to get support in a crisis situation.
- Promote training for Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions who will signpost to support, raise awareness and normalise conversations about mental health.
- Promote the HSC Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing Campaign to individuals in Councils and the NIHE.
- Support Councils and the NIHE to provide employees with good working conditions and ensure they have a healthy work life balance, opportunities for development and the policies and procedures in place to support this, e.g. flexible working, coaching and mentoring, etc.

INDICATORS

of Success

- Improvements in levels of workplace mental health by conducting employee surveys, wellbeing risk assessments and monitoring of data in relation to sickness absence levels due to mental health.
- Number of participants attending mental health training activities across all councils and NIHE.
- Stigma will be tackled and a positive culture of workplace mental health will be achieved and measured through benchmarking, performance indicators and the achievement of accreditations/awards.
- All councils and the NIHE will have signed up to the ECNI Mental Health Charter or the Mind 'Time to Change' Pledge.
- Satisfaction levels with the programme of activities and training events, and their impact on individuals in Councils and the NIHE.
- Awareness of the ASK brand.
- Numbers of Mental Health Champions trained.
- Increase in the number of downloads of 'Here2Help' App.
- Local government will be recognised for best practice in health and wellbeing.
- External stakeholders will have a mechanism, through the working group, to share their views and information with individuals in Councils and the NIHE.
- Individuals in Councils and the NIHE have the knowledge to support themselves, colleagues and family experiencing poor mental health.
- Councils and the NIHE benefit from cross-sectoral working and partnership initiatives.
- Reduction in absence levels due to mental health issues.



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