



## Human Resources

# MENTAL HEALTH POLICY



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Surrey Heath Borough Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for all our employees, by providing initial and ongoing mental health support throughout the course of employment.
- 1.2 Some common Mental health problems in the workplace include:
- Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- 1.3 Research shows that one in six workers experience mental health problems, which manifests in mental health being the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK. Therefore, the Council understands the importance of protecting the mental health of its staff, and the positive impact this can have on the overall success of the Council.

Furthermore, the Council remains committed to its equality strategy and mental health risks are taken just as seriously as physical health risks under the Council's Health and Safety policy.

- 1.4 To access mental health support employees can have a conversation with their manager, however if an individual does not feel comfortable doing this they can also turn to HR, who can make a referral to occupational health if necessary. Other support includes speaking with a mental health first aider, and the employee assistance helpline.

## 2. Key principles

- 2.1 The purpose of the policy is to:



- Facilitate an environment where people can openly talk about mental health.
- Ensuring that support is provided to those struggling with their mental health.
- Follow Surrey Heath Borough Council's commitment to the mental health at work commitment standard.
- Set out the rights of staff experiencing mental health difficulties and highlight support.
- 2.2 The Council provides clear practices to help support both the manager and the employee-

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#### Job/Person Fit

- When joining the council the employee fully understands the role that they have been recruited for and receive an informative induction.

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#### Management Processes

- At work the manager processes regular probation, appraisal, training and ongoing development for the team member to support the employee become a valued member of their team.

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#### Spot signs early

- The manager discusses and supports the employee when they see early signs of mental health difficulties and offer appropriate adjustments.

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#### Early Active Engagement

- When an employee is off sick the manager will refer to the Attendance Policy. Engage and communicate with the employee. Support and plan for their return.
- Manage the rest of the team to monitor their well being with increased work loads.

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#### Return Plan

- When the employee returns the manager discusses a work plan and actively monitor and supports the team member



## 3. Legal obligations

- 3.1 The Council understands that the Equality Act 2010 protects employees with a disability against discrimination which includes an obligation for employers to introduce reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.
- A disability is defined in the act as “a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”
  - ‘Long term’ is generally taken to mean an impairment which lasts for at least twelve months.
- 3.2 The Health and Safety Act 1974 sets out the Council’s legal duty of care for their employees, which includes protecting the physical and mental welfare of its staff while at work. In order to fulfil this duty of care, the Council must make a proactive effort to enquire about an employee’s wellbeing and provide individual support.
- 3.3 Additionally, The Management of Health and Safety work regulations 1999 requires the Council, in response to a stress at work risk assessment, to take specific action. A stress at work risk assessment evaluates the main causes of workplace stress, examining which employees are likely to be affected, the steps the employer is taking to mitigate risks, alongside who is responsible for each action.

## 4. Recruitment

- 4.1 Additionally, unless it is related to the specific requirements of the job, Surrey Heath Borough Council will not ask applicants at any stage of the recruitment process for information regarding any previous health issues, in order to ensure potential employees are not discriminated against because of their mental health history.
- 4.2 Surrey Heath Borough Council may use Occupational Health as an interventional measure to support the employee. The purpose of this



questionnaire is to make sure that certain health needs are met, and that reasonable adjustments can be provided if necessary.

## 5. Prevention and Early Intervention

- 5.1 Early intervention is extremely important to prevent mental health problems from escalating. Indicators of declining mental health do not always present in the workplace, however early signs may include:
- Behavioural, mood or temperament changes, especially when communicating with others
  - Decrease in productivity and focus
  - Difficulty making decisions and problem solving
  - Showing signs of tiredness or becoming withdrawn or unable to take part in hobbies they usually participate in
  - Reducing intake of food, or increasing intake of alcohol, cigarettes ect.
- 5.2 Awareness of potential triggers in the workplace is equally important for preventing mental ill-health. Triggers may include:
- High-pressure environment with a high workload or unrealistic deadline expectations
  - Lone working
  - Job insecurity or management changeover
  - Working long hours and not taking breaks (The working time directive sets out forty-eight hours as the maximum weekly working hours)
  - A negative workplace culture or poor management

## 6. All Employee's responsibility



- 6.1 Any support required by the employee is likely to be known by the employee themselves, therefore it is the responsibility of the employee to raise any mental health concerns. Surrey Heath Borough Council actively encourages employees to be open and honest about their mental health and to inform their line manager of any issues at an early opportunity to allow these to be addressed. Employees can also turn to HR for a confidential initial conversation, who can then make a referral to occupational health, or other medical guidance if required.

Alternatively, employees can approach a mental health first aider to seek further support. Equally, all employees have access to the employee assistance helpline who provide 24/7 advice and counselling over the phone on 0800 328 1437.

- 6.2 There is also an expectation on all Surrey Heath Borough Council employees to conduct themselves in a helpful and open-minded manner towards colleagues who have mental health problems, and familiarise themselves with this guidance.

## 7. Line manager responsibility

- 7.1 When dealing with an employee with mental health concerns, line managers should be open, welcoming and friendly, having familiarised themselves with this guidance. They should invite the employee to regular private meetings and ask them to talk openly about their mental health problems, and stressors that may be outside the work environment. If the line manager feels uncomfortable, they can contact HR for support.
- 7.2 The line manager should not make presumptions about how the mental health problem is impacting on the employee personally and professionally. Initial action should be to check how the employee is getting on at work, in the same manner as if the employee was suffering from a known physical health problem.

## 8. Reasonable adjustments



- 8.1 Surrey Heath Borough Council is also under a legal obligation to make temporary reasonable adjustments to an employee's role or workplace if they have a disability that places them at a disadvantage when performing their role. A disability is defined as "a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial long-term adverse effect on an individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." Adjustments will be considered following Occupational Health guidance.

Adjustments may include:

- Adjusting hours of work or the location of work, including within the building itself
- Adjusting or reallocating duties of the job role
- Amending absence triggers before disciplinary action is triggered
- Increased support and supervision
- Providing opportunities to reflect on achievements and set targets to boost self esteem
- Once the adjustments are agreed, they will be reviewed on an ongoing basis in line with requirement of service and business need.

## 9. Absence and return to work

- 9.1 Where the employee is absent by reason of their mental health concerns, their line manager will communicate with the employee on a regular basis during their absence. The employee returning to work may help with their recovery, so early intervention and support from Surrey Heath Borough Council is important. The Council's attendance policy will apply to the employee's absence as normal, subject to any reasonable adjustments in place for the employee.
- 9.2 Upon the employee's return from absence, a return to work plan will be discussed and agreed between the line manager and the employee to ensure necessary steps can be taken to support the employee to remain in work. This can include introducing a temporary return on amended



working hours, removing stressful duties during a phased return, and providing additional workplace support as necessary.

## 10. Available support

### 9.2 Mental Health First Aiders

Surrey Heath has nominated and trained mental health first aiders, whose presence help to raise awareness for mental health problems. Their role is to facilitate early intervention by spotting the signs of declining mental health and signposting to other appropriate support, such as support groups, when necessary. A [list of our mental health first aiders](#) can be found on Warbler under the mental health and wellbeing page.

### 9.2 Employee assistance helpline

Surrey Heath Borough Council has made available an Employee Assistance helpline, offering confidential 24/7 counselling and advice services over the phone on 0800 328 1437. Or you can book appointments with a councillor or advisor at [employeeassistance.org.uk](http://employeeassistance.org.uk) (for this you will need the access code: SHBC)

### 9.2 Surrey E- learning

Surrey Heath Borough Council also has access to a wealth of online learning wellbeing resources. These courses encourage employees to manage their own mental health, as well as mental health and stress awareness courses which help employees support each other in the workplace.

### 9.2 External links

(a more extensive list can be found on the health and wellbeing Warbler page)

- [NHS](#)





Mental Health Crisis Helpline: 0800 915 4644: 24 hour support for people in Surrey and North East Hampshire experiencing a mental health crisis

- Shout  
Free texting service which is confidential and anonymous just text 85258
- Mind  
A Mental health charity with a wealth of further information and support on their website. <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- CIPD guide for people managers on supporting mental health at work  
A useful guide aimed at helping managers navigate mental health in the workplace with lots of suggestions, and examples of best practice. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/mental-health-support-guide/>

## II. Data protection

- II.1 Surrey Heath Borough Council will process personal data in accordance with its Data Protection Policy. Data is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of providing the necessary support to employees.

