

# Report



## Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member for Education and Early Years

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### Part 1

Date: 8 August 2024

**Subject** Wellness At Work Policy - Revisions

**Purpose** For Cabinet Member to consider the proposal to amend the Wellness at Work Policy.

**Author** HR & OD Manager

**Ward** All

**Summary** The Council's Wellness at Work Policy was introduced in January 2022 as a new approach to managing health and wellbeing in the organisation.

Following feedback from managers, headteachers and employees on enhancing the guidance around the application of the policy and expectations of process to be followed, the policy has been updated to include:

- Clear guidance for managers and employees on application of the policy including the introduction of "Action Review Points"
- Clear guidance on preparing for a return to work as part of better management of health and wellbeing including the introduction of the "Reasonable Adjustment Plan" to replace the wellbeing support plan
- Improving processes to include both digital and word versions of forms and plans to ensure full engagement of managers and employees.

A revised version of the policy is included in the appendix to this report.

**Proposal** To adopt the revised version of the Wellness at Work Policy contained in the appendix to this report.

**Action by** Head of People, Policy and Transformation

**Timetable** Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Head of People, Policy & Transformation
- Relevant Trade Unions
- Staff Networks
- Corporate Management Team
- Managers, Headteachers and employees
- Head of Law and Standards

## Background

The Council recognises that its employees are its most valuable resource in delivering high quality services to our communities and seeks to take proactive steps to bring its policies in line with the Council's core values. In fulfilling its responsibilities to our employees, the Council is committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment for everyone who works for the organisation.

The Wellness at Work Policy replaced the previous Management of Attendance Policy as a modern approach to managing health and wellbeing within the organisation by replacing a previously sanction-based approach to a support-based approach. The policy removed the traditional 'trigger' process as a means to improve attendance and adopted a collaborative approach to encourage employees to understand that the Council will support them during periods of ill health or to manage health and wellbeing conditions in the workplace and give them the opportunity to focus on receiving the necessary support. However, feedback from both managers and employees indicated a lack of understanding of how to best use the new approach and necessary actions following the removal of the trigger points. Managers reported challenges in applying the policy consistently and employees reported a lack of understanding on how they are expected to engage in the processes that support the policy and their health and wellbeing.

Following a period of consultation, including focus groups with managers, unions, headteachers and employees to understand feedback and issues around the policy and processes, it was clear that the policy required review to improve understanding and application. A review was undertaken during the end of 2023, with a revised policy ready for formal consultation from January 2024, including discussion with the relevant trade union through the Employee Partnership Forum.

## Proposal

The revised policy has been reviewed to include important updates to support better management of health and wellbeing:

- Clear guidance for managers and employees on the implementation and application of the policy including the introduction of "Action Review Points" (ARPs). ARPs have been designed for both managers (to provide clear guidance on how and when to support an employee) and employees (when and how they can expect to be managed and how they will engage in the process).
- Clear guidance on preparing for a return to work as part of better management of health and wellbeing including the introduction of the "Reasonable Adjustment Plan" (RAP) to replace the wellbeing support plan. The RAP is a manager-led process to ensure appropriate dialogue with an employee to explore adjustments required to allow an employee to return to work or remain well in work. It replaces the wellbeing support plan which was an employee-led process but was less successful in ensuring manager and employee discussed and recorded reasonable adjustments.
- Improving processes to include both digital and word versions of forms/ plans to ensure full engagement. Feedback from managers, especially headteachers, confirmed a requirement for more flexibility in the format for completing wellbeing check-ins and support plans by offering the option of editable word documents. To ensure compliance with the policy, options will be made available in both formats.

These revisions will significantly improve the management of health and wellbeing within the organisation by setting our both employee and manager expectations. The revised policy will be supplemented by manager and employee communication and training to ensure greater understanding and engagement.

## **Financial implications**

There are no direct costs to the implementation of the revised policy, however the cost of absence is significant to the Council and measures such as the Wellness at Work Policy and the enhancements proposes, should have a positive impact on absence rates.

## **Risks**

The policy is already in place and established within the Council. Without the revisions included in the updated policy, managers and employees will lack the essential guidance to benefit from better management of health and wellbeing which could lead to increased absence rates and reduced morale and engagement.

## **Benefits**

The policy will allow better management of health and wellbeing and will reduce overall absence levels within the organisation which will improve productivity through better attendance in work, promote better employee morale and engagement and establish a healthier and inclusive culture which will make the Council an attractive employer to prospective candidates.

## **Links to Council Policies and Priorities**

The approach has been developed through consultation and supports the People Plan signed off by Cabinet: [People Plan 2024-2028](#)

## **Options Available**

The options available are as follows:

1. For the Cabinet Member to approve the proposed revisions to the Wellness at Work Policy
2. For the Cabinet Member to not approve the proposed revisions to the Wellness at Work Policy

## **Preferred Option and Why**

For the Cabinet Member to approve the proposed revisions to the Wellness at Work Policy to achieve better outcomes for the Council in managing employee health and wellbeing.

## **Comments of Chief Financial Officer**

There are no direct costs to the implementation of the revised policy, however the cost of absence is significant to the Council and measures such as the Wellness at Work Policy and the enhancements proposes, should have a positive impact on absence rates.

## **Comments of Monitoring Officer**

The decision to adopt the revised policy is one for the Cabinet Member. Adoption of the revised policy is recommended in order to ensure a lawful and consistent approach across the organisation to supporting staff.

## **Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation**

The comments of the Head of People, Policy and Transformation are considered in the overall body of the report. The policy will improve the management of health and wellbeing within the organisation and

contribute significantly to the strategic theme of “Employee Wellbeing” within the new People Plan to “*create an organisation where health and wellbeing of our workforce, both physically and mentally, is supported and promoted*”.

## **Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:**

- **Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act**
- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Socio-economic Duty**
- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

A full Fairness & Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the implementation of the Wellness at Work Policy in 2021. The FEIA identified that those most vulnerable due to their protected characteristic would be better supported through policy. The FEIA outcomes remain unchanged because of these changes to the revised policy, therefore a new FEIA is not necessary. The FEIA was included in a report to the Employee Partnership Forum in July 2021 for consideration.

From a Well-being of Future Generations Act perspective:

Improving the health and wellbeing of our own workforce demonstrates our contribution to both “a healthier Wales” as part of the Future Generations Act, ‘*to enable people to be healthy, independent and resilient*’ and our People Plan 2024-2028 to “*promote and support the wellbeing of our workforce. Employee wellbeing is a core element of employee engagement and organisational performance. The wellbeing of our staff is critical in creating a positive working environments for our staff to thrive*”.

As outlined within the report.

## **Background Papers**

[People Plan](#) and [HR policies](#).  
EPF Agenda/Reports

**Dated: 8 August 2024**