

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting: 20 January 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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## **Mental Health Challenge for local authorities**

### **Report summary:**

This report explores the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge and considers the implications of signing up to the commitments as a way of promoting mental health awareness and maintaining good mental health for elected members, staff and our communities.

The Council already have a number of programmes designed to maintain good mental health and the challenge builds on existing commitments in our Public Health Strategic Plan and our Happy, Healthy, Here programme.

### **Recommendation:**

- 1. That the Council adopt and sign up to the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge, and**
- 2. The appointed Mental Health Member Champion have regard to the guidelines contained in the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge in carrying out their role, and**
- 3. A Lead Officer is identified and additional officer capacity is approved to further support staff and facilitate positive mental health for elected members, and**
- 4. The commitment is captured in the updated Council Plan and in our Public Health Strategic Plan, and**
- 5. A request is made to Council for a budget to cover the cost of the appointment.**

### **Reason for recommendation:**

To take forward the Cabinet's request to further explore the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge and assess the implications of adopting the actions set out in the challenge.

Officer: John Golding Strategic Lead – Housing, Health & Environment.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action
- Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

## Financial implications:

If members adopt the recommendations in this report then it will need to be determined whether a new post in the Council's establishment is to be created and if so it estimated this would require an annual budget of £50,000. This is currently not included in the draft 2021/22 budget, members may feel this a high priority and could be considered to be met from the additional government funding of £700k. This sum was being held for specific cost risks outlined in the budget report; although this particular expenditure was not identified in the report. Members are reminded of future significant funding gaps identified in the Council's medium Term Financial Plan and an additional staff member being added to the annual budget does add to the savings required in future years.

## Legal implications:

There are no legal implications requiring comment.

**Equalities impact** Medium Impact

**Climate change** Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

## Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 At the Cabinet meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020 I was asked to produce a report to explore in more detail the value of signing up to the **Local Authority Mental Health Challenge** and as a consequence the case for appointing a member champion and a lead officer. Further concerns about mental health were expressed in debate on draft Service Plans at the January 2021 joint Overview and Scrutiny meetings.
- 1.2 This report was requested following a motion to Council and the subsequent consideration and presentation of the Overview Committees considerations to Cabinet.
- 1.3 The **World Health Organisation** defines mental health as - "Mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder. It is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community."
- 1.4 **Public Health England** (PHE) supports the view that everyone, irrespective of where they live, should have the opportunity to achieve good mental health and wellbeing. PHE have a range of resources available to support national and local organisations to do this and work towards the commitments within the NHS report '[Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#)'.

This includes the 3 key overlapping areas of public mental health across the life course:

- mental health promotion
- prevention of mental health problems and suicide prevention

- improving lives, supporting recovery and inclusion of people living with mental health problems

PHE is a founding member of [Equally Well UK](#) and leads mental health campaigns and digital resources including [Rise Above](#) and [Every Mind Matters](#).

- 1.5 The **Mental Health Challenge for Local Authorities** was initiated in 2013 to encourage and support councils in England to champion mental health in their communities. In essence the Challenge offers a way of focusing on evidence-based priorities and of working within an established national structure: <http://www.mentalhealthchallenge.org.uk/>
- 1.6 There are budget and capacity considerations if East Devon District Council signs up to the Mental Health Challenge, because councils who sign the Challenge:
- Commit to appoint an elected member as ‘mental health champion’ across the council
  - Seek to identify a member of staff within the council to act as ‘lead officer’ for mental health.
- 1.7 The concerns raised by members and the prevalence of poor mental health in communities today are recognised by the council. EDDC already has initiatives which go some way to supporting those experiencing mental health issues. These local activities through which we already make a difference are captured in our Public Health Strategy and for our own staff in the **Happy, Healthy, Here programme** summarised in **annex 1**.
- 1.8 Our Human Resources team have devised and built an enviable programme of Happy, Healthy, Here initiatives to support and maintain our staffs mental and physical health. Our Human Resources Officer delivers a range of activities designed to support staff welfare and safety.
- 1.9 Our recently published **Statement of Intent** includes the following commitment under Better Homes & Communities - Promoting health & wellbeing, including healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and good mental health. This demonstrates our commitment to positive physical and mental health.
- 1.10 Our **Public Health Strategic Plan 2019-2023** contains numerous references to mental health and defines public health as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society. Throughout our Strategic Plan ‘public health’ is used to cover physical and mental health and wellbeing of everyone in our district. Our ‘at a glance’ summary is reproduced in **annex 2**.  
<https://eastdevon.gov.uk/environmental-health-and-wellbeing/health-and-wellbeing/east-devon-s-public-health-plan-and-review-of-progress/public-health-strategic-plan/>
- 1.11 One of the priorities in the Plan is improving mental health and this is articulated throughout the plan in the activities and actions planned including projects on social isolation, drug & alcohol use, supporting tenants, social prescribing, making every contact count, self-harm etc. Several of our **Service Plans** also pick up on the theme of mental health.
- 1.12 Our **Investors in People** assessment and platinum award had regard to staff welfare, recognising the measures in place to promote motivated, healthy and productive employees who were clear about their job role and purpose of the organisation. There was recognition that the organisation cares about its people and put store in developing, coaching and motivating colleagues. The report also identified the need to be ambitious and continuously improving with suggestions around succession planning, cross service collaboration, sharing learning. Continual promotion of many of the issues in the assessment will influence positive mental health amongst staff and members.

- 1.13 The mental health champion role is necessarily limited. It is not a clinical role, but would operate along the lines of our equalities and safeguarding work by raising awareness inside the organisation. Cabinet proposed a member champion at its meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2020, which was subsequently approved by Council. A guide on performing the role is set out in the challenge and outlined below.
- 1.14 Specialist mental health services are delivered in **Devon Partnership NHS Trust**. A wide range of services are provided under the mental health umbrella from psychiatric services, to learning disability, drugs & alcohol, etc. The Trust has a purpose stated as – Supporting you to live well. Their vision is - An inclusive society where the importance of mental health and wellbeing is universally understood and valued. The stated mission is - To become a recognised centre of excellence and expertise in mental health and learning disability within the next five years.
- 1.15 The Trusts website provides more detail:  
<https://www.dpt.nhs.uk/>

## **2. Adopting the mental health challenge and moving forward**

- 2.1 I have undertaken some further research into the implications of signing up to the Mental Health Challenge. From the Cabinet discussions I took away strong support for the principle of signing up, so I am focusing on the implications and options for delivering the commitments.
- 2.2 The challenge commits us to a number of actions, which I have summarised below:

### **This council believes:**

As a local authority we have a crucial role to play in improving the mental health of everyone in our community and tackling some of the widest and most entrenched inequalities in health.

Mental health should be a priority across all the local authority's areas of responsibility, including housing, community safety and planning.

All councillors, whether members of the Executive or Scrutiny and in our community and casework roles, can play a positive role in championing mental health on an individual and strategic basis.

### **This council resolves:**

To sign the Local Authorities' Mental Health Challenge run by Centre for Mental Health, Mental Health Foundation, AMHP, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal College of Psychiatrists and YoungMinds.

We commit to appoint an elected member as 'mental health champion' across the council.

We will seek to identify a member of staff within the council to act as 'lead officer' for mental health.

### **The council will also:**

Support positive mental health in our community, including in local schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces.

Work to reduce inequalities in mental health in our community.

Work with local partners to offer effective support for people with mental health needs.

Tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health in our community.

Proactively listen to people of all ages and backgrounds about what they need for better mental health.

### **The member champion:**

Enthusiasm and commitment are more important than formal position in becoming a member champion. What is crucial is that an elected local authority member takes on this role in order to influence the full range of the authority's activities and responsibilities.

The role of champion will be defined locally, but key activities might include:

- Advocating for mental health issues in council meetings and policy development
- Reaching out to the local community (e.g. via schools, businesses, faith groups) to raise awareness and challenge stigma
- Listening to people with personal experiences of mental ill health to get their perspectives on local needs and priorities
- Scrutinising the work of local services that have an impact on mental health: e.g. health, social care, housing, and police.
- Fostering local partnerships between agencies to support people with mental health problems more effectively
- Encouraging the council to support the mental health of its own workforce and those of its contractors.

The member champion will have access to the following benefits to help them in these roles:

- Advice and support from the mental health challenge national partners (usually by phone or email)
- Access to resources on the challenge web site
- A monthly update on relevant news, events and key policy developments
- An annual meeting with other member champions to share intelligence, experiences and ideas
- Workshops and other learning events on key topics
- As local leaders for better mental health, we expect all member champions to:
  - Provide a vocal presence for mental health within their council where this is necessary
  - Identify at least one priority each year for focused work
  - Seek the views of people with lived experiences of mental ill health when identifying priorities and concerns
  - Work respectfully, sensitively and empathically with people with mental health problems at all times
  - Respond to occasional requests from the challenge coordinator for updates on activities undertaken in the role of member champion.

We are aware that member champions are elected members of councils who have a number of competing priorities and limited time to put into the role of member champion.

The national partners reserve the right to raise concerns where member champions whose conduct falls below the expectations set out above. Where steps are not taken to address concerns expressed by the national partners, councils may be removed from the challenge membership.

### **Lead officer role description:**

The role of lead officer can be taken by any staff member in the council. Their role may include, but not be limited by:

- Providing information to the member champion to support their work
- Advising the member champion on current issues and priorities
- Supporting implementation of strategies initiated by the member champion
- Raising awareness within the council's staff about mental health issues
- Seeking external support for activities led by the council to promote mental health and wellbeing
- Liaising with the mental health challenge national partners to secure information and advice
- Extending and supporting the Happy, Healthy, Here programme

The lead officer will also have access to the benefits described above for member champions.

- 2.3 Cllr Millar who requested this report has contacted the Centre for Mental Health for their advice on this matter and they responded:

“We’re very aware of the resource limitations facing local councils so have always been clear we have no expectations that it will require money or staff time. We created the ‘lead officer’ role as many councils have found it helpful to have a staff member to support the elected member champion. It’s not a requirement but it can help to unify staff and members and should not be especially time consuming. You might for example have a staff member who has a responsibility for wellbeing at work who might like to take this on as part of what they are doing, or a democratic services officer who would be happy to support. From experience, I’d say housing is an excellent place to locate the lead officer role because housing is so incredibly important for mental health and it will always be beneficial to have someone in the housing team who ‘gets it’ “.

- 2.4 In exploring the implications of adopting the Mental Health Challenge we were advised that Braintree District Council were an exemplar organisation and early adopter of the challenge. We made contact with their Lead Officer who kindly provided a statement and answered our questions. I have captured this exchange in **annex 3**.

### **3. Lead officer for mental health**

- 3.1 There are several options for appointing a lead officer to conform to the Mental Health Challenge and a range of ways in which we can highlight mental health issues across the organisation.
- 3.2 We can create a new post with specialist skills and knowledge of mental health as part of the staff establishment. The role could support staff and member mental health, and expand and deliver the projects that contribute towards good mental health. It would be a health

education type post rather than providing medical/clinical advice. A post at scale 8 would cost circa. £ 50,000 per annum.

- 3.3 The job description will be based on the outline set out in the Challenge above. I have added in our Happy, Healthy, Here programme to provide a local flavour. The post could operate in a similar fashion to our Public Health Project Officer who coordinates action across the Council and links with partners with a clear health & wellbeing focus. Mental health is a cross-cutting theme similar to health & wellbeing, climate change, poverty and a number of other activities that cross Service boundaries.
- 3.4 The post could fit into the organisational structure under the Strategic Lead – Housing, Health & Environment alongside the Public Health, Safeguarding and Environmental Health activities. Alternatively, the post could sit with Human Resources or Democratic Services.
- 3.5 Whichever option is adopted it is vital that awareness of positive mental health is embedded in the organisation, raising the profile of the issues contributing towards poor mental health and identifying how members and staff can maintain good mental health. We should also appreciate that this would be a preventative and educational role, not a clinical practitioner dealing with the complexities of medical illness.
- 3.6 It should also be recognised that a single lead officer does not provide sufficient capacity to champion mental health in our communities. This would require significantly more resources and could be considered at a later stage as a development of our Public Health Strategic Plan.