

### **Comments and advice from Braintree District Council**

As part of our research into the Mental Health Challenge we have sourced advice from Braintree District Council who took up the Mental Health Challenge some time ago.

Their Lead Officer provided the following advice:

I think it is important to note that you can make the challenge as big or small as you wish. The most important aspect to note is that it demonstrates a commitment of the Council to improving the wellbeing of your residents and staff. I should think that you are likely delivering most of the challenge anyway through your health, community and HR services and much of the challenge for us was recognising that actually, we fulfil a lot of the challenge through a variety of services, but it gave us a good reason pull together what we were doing and where the gaps were.

We undertook the LA Mental Health Challenge in 2014 and committed to fulfilling 7 of the (then 10) aspects (which is what we felt we could do at the time) and I will describe how this has developed in the past 6 years. Some challenge points have changed since we undertook this and are more generic now:

Member Champion -

We decided to appoint every Member as a Mental Health Champion and have a lead Member - Cllr Olivia Sanders. Cllr Sanders is also Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board (amongst other duties). We annually recommended that new Members were appointed and this continued for some years, but has not been refreshed recently. Members are provided with information about supporting residents and their wellbeing, and training opportunities through the Centre for Mental Health.

Cllr Sanders' role in her position as lead Champion provided us with an excellent engagement opportunity with local residents and members of the local Mental Health Forum who were able to provide feedback on services and advise on improvements. Her role as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board has enabled mental health to be a continued local health priority and it is a cross cutting theme across every aspect of our health improvement delivery.

Appointing an elected member as Champion has enabled us to demonstrate that the Council is committed to the wellbeing of its residents and helps to reduce stigma and increase awareness across the community. It encourages residents to come forward with mental health issues and Members know how to refer and signpost appropriately.

Lead Officer -

In 2014 I was identified as lead officer to support the MH challenge commitments. As an existing member of the Community Services team, already working with a number of vulnerable people and groups, and with a personal interest in the topic, I was able to undertake the role without too much additional commitment as many aspects of

the challenge were already being delivered by the team and across various council departments.

I work with the Health and Wellbeing Board, NHS and CCG and a number of local voluntary and key organisations, supporting mental health and wellbeing initiatives delivered in the community and our team also commissions additional projects where required.

I also support staff wellbeing, working closely with HR to ensure we raise awareness of local services and support pathways, and ensure that mental health remains a constant conversation amongst staff. My team and I deliver a number of physical and social staff activities to support, such as healthy walks, health checks, team challenges. I coordinate Mental Health First Aiders training and we meet regularly as group to discuss how we can continue to improve staff wellbeing.

Reducing inequalities, working with partners, tackling discrimination, promoting good mental and better support -

These are delivered through ongoing partnership working with key voluntary organisations and health services, identifying joint priorities and commissioning appropriate programmes. We also deliver a specific Mental Health Small Grants scheme for local organisations to deliver against our priorities. We work with a network of local providers of mental health services to support development and advise on funding etc. We take every opportunity to promote good mental health in the community and signpost to local support services.

Reducing health inequalities is a cross cutting key priority in our recent Health and Wellbeing Strategy. We promote national campaigns through our social media channels, partners, and amongst residents to reduce stigma and discrimination in the community.

We are a Mindful Employer, and have also signed up to the Time to Change Employer's Pledge for staff.

To answer your questions directly:

**I would like to know if your authority has appointed a specialist mental health officer in-house to promote good staff and elected member mental health. If you have, whether you could share a job description and the business case for such an appointment.**

No, as above, this was absorbed by the Community Services team.

**Do you have a stated purpose and actions for your champion roles – member and staff?**

No, but the purpose is outlined as part of the MH challenge here <http://www.mentalhealthchallenge.org.uk/the-challenge/>

We have had various action plans over the years, but none recently.

**How does any internal role differ from and go beyond the normal HR support to staff ? We have a well-developed Happy, Healthy, Here programme for staff with access to coaching, occupational health, advice and support etc. Have you gone beyond this thinking as part of the mental health challenge?**

Your staff programme sounds as if it covers most - we have an EAP, training and development opportunities, wellbeing and social activities, pulse surveys and wellbeing checks and we encourage staff to utilise wellness action plans where they feel necessary. We have trained managers to be more approachable and discuss wellbeing openly with staff. We have a social and wellbeing Teams channel posting regular information. For example, this week we are running activities for World Mental Health Day and posting information about remote working, stigma and the importance of checking in with colleagues. We currently have 12 mental health First Aiders with 3 more booked in for training. We hold lunch and learn sessions for staff. We take the opportunity of national campaigns such as Time to Talk Day, to highlight that support is available and accessible. We have internal Health Champions who meet regularly, and are working towards our Healthy Workplace accreditation with Provide. Currently we are very aware that staff are working differently to normal and may feel isolated so a lot of effort has been put into providing connections, information and support. We developed an internal SWAY site for staff to support them during lockdown and this is continually updated.

**We have existing commitments to improving mental health in our Public Health Strategic Plan and various Service Plans. Have you developed ambitions that go further and if so where have these been articulated – Council Plan, separate strategy document?**

We have an overarching Health and Wellbeing Strategy with a workstream for mental health and wellbeing that sits across all of the priorities, and wellbeing is mentioned in several key documents, including our corporate strategy and Local Development Plan and Health Impact Assessments. We have signed up to the Time to Change Employer Pledge and we are also a Mindful Employer. We have a Social Value policy that looks at wider objectives.

**How have you ‘mainstreamed’ or embedded mental health awareness in your organisation such that it is considered core business?**

The more we have promoted, discussed, and delivered activities, the more we have 'normalised' discussions around mental health. We also have very supportive Members and senior staff who recognise the importance of mental wellbeing and advocate for it in team, group meetings and the wider community.

**How much time do you spend in the Mental Health / Local Authority Mental Health aspect of your role a week (on average)?**

This varies and is more at the moment because of COVID-19, our community support network and staff support, but I would say 30% on average.

**What value would you say your role brings for a middle-tier authority?**

It encourages the Council to continue to think about health and wellbeing in all policies.

It raises awareness of mental ill health and support pathways across the community, preventing later more intensive NHS intervention which can be costly and have long waiting times.

It allows us to engage with harder to reach members of our community and work with them to identify priorities and address gaps in services

It helps develop our third sector organisations and levy additional funding for the community

It shows we care about all members of our community

It allows us to codesign services

It encourages our staff and Members to be upskilled

It helps to reduce stigma in the community

### **Do the Local Authority Mental Health Challenge network provide support and make it easy?**

Yes - it is very easy, support is available from the challenge team whenever you need it.

### **Any campaigns/ big victories for residents in Brentwood and internally that you feel worth highlighting?**

When we signed up, we were the first Council to elect every Member as a Mental Health Champion!

We have an excellent network of mental health service providers across the Borough and have supported this network to grow county-wide. It is a one stop shop for local information about where you can get help, run voluntarily by people with lived experience. This has made it simple and stress free to signpost people to get the help they need quickly.

I am proud that we have a group of Members and staff that recognises the prevalence of mental health problems across the community and demonstrates their commitment to improving resident's and employee's wellbeing through policies and services.

For us, undertaking the Mental Health Challenge in 2014 really helped to bring some much needed attention and focus to mental health at a time when, although only 6 years ago, it wasn't talked about so prominently or seen as a major priority. I am pleased that as a country we have come a long way in a short space of time in normalising mental health illness and brought it to the top of most health agendas.