



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

Mental Health at Work Commitment guide for the housing sector



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Foreword

When people think about housing, they often think about buildings. But for housing professionals, our work is about people, even more than the homes they live in.

For many of us, the people that make their homes in the buildings and communities for which we're responsible are what makes our work so worthwhile. We have opportunities to make a difference every day, and to know that what we do matters. For some people, the difference we make is small – we just need to provide the services they're entitled to courteously and efficiently.

But others – a growing number – have been through a lot before they get the home they need. In areas of high housing need, the things that contribute to mental health problems such as unstable work, financial hardship, family troubles and long-term physical health problems, are also the things that may eventually get you a home. In fact, the way the rehousing system works often requires people to show us their pain in order to get priority. It's not a system that supports mental wellbeing.

So many of our customers start their time as a social housing tenant in a very difficult place, and that's not helped by the ordinary stress of moving home. And once they have that roof over their head, most of the reasons people need to contact us are also stressful: needing repair work, trouble with rent payments, neighbour disputes or anti-social behaviour. We rarely hear from tenants for whom things are going well. People that work in housing because of their desire to help others find that stress and mental health problems are a factor in many of their interactions. And working with people who are stressed or have mental health problems can be challenging.

Around one in three social housing tenants have mental health challenges. Experience shows that only a minority of tenants that need support are receiving it. And sometimes, everything that we can do just isn't enough. That can be hard. It can take its toll. It can undermine our ability to serve with compassion, and it can undermine our own mental health.

My mission through my year as CIH president is to shine a light on mental health in housing. I want every organisation working in housing to be a place where it's OK to not be OK. And I want housing professionals to know that they have a right and a responsibility to ask for help. Mental health matters to us as landlords, as employers, and as people, and we need to look out for ourselves and each other, in order to be there for the people that rely on us.

We've created this Mental Health at Work Commitment guide with Mind, to provide employers in the housing sector with guidance on how they can support their staff to care for their own mental health along with their colleagues'. It includes steps they can take – from a senior strategic level, through to things that every single employee can do, such as signposting colleagues to resources.

Mental health really is an area where tenants and staff are in it together. All too often, our systems and the way we work within them can be part of the problem. Later in the year we'll be producing a companion guide, looking at how we could raise our game as landlords to become part of the solution.

In the meantime, I hope that this guide helps you create an environment where you and your employees feel safe, secure, supported and are able to thrive.

Aileen Evans, president of the
Chartered Institute of Housing
#shinealight



How to use the guide

Positively managing mental health underpins good employee engagement and benefits everyone – employees, employers and the bottom line. Housing providers' success in building and managing the homes people need depends on a healthy and productive workforce, and if employees feel valued and supported they'll achieve more.

The Mental Health at Work Commitment is a simple framework that builds on what good practice looks like. It's based on the 'Thriving at Work' standards and includes six standards for how organisations can better support employees' mental health.

By signing up to the commitment, and adopting the six standards within it, housing providers and stakeholder organisations, whatever their size, will be:

- equipped with the awareness and tools to both address and prevent mental ill-health which is caused or worsened by work
- equipped to support people with a mental health condition to thrive, from when they're recruited and throughout their time in the organisation
- aware of how to get access to timely help to reduce sickness absence caused by mental ill health.

We strongly recommend that all housing providers and stakeholders, no matter what your workplace type or size, adopt the six standards

We have based this guide for housing sector employers on the Mental Health at Work Commitment. We hope that housing organisations of all shapes and sizes, with different working practices and environments will be able to adapt the commitments to their needs. What is reasonable for an employer and how long it will take to implement will be based on a number of factors. Therefore this guide is not intended to be a 'one size fits all approach' rather it is designed to equip organisations with the knowledge and tools to create a more inclusive working environment for all staff.

For those organisations who are at the start and are just now beginning to take action, use this guide to help you take the first steps and make a long-term commitment to a better way of working. For those organisations who are further along, use this guide to formalise your approach and use the standards to benchmark how well you support mental health and wellbeing in your organisation.

Useful links

Sign up and access a range of resources to help implement the standards:

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/commitment



Commitment one

Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity.

L&Q case study

From L&Q's Head of Diversity and inclusion

When they signed the Time to Change employer pledge, social housing sector leader L&Q committed to change the way they think and act about mental health in the workplace. Their wellbeing strategy includes activities to help break the silence that surrounds mental health, such as developing a new Mental Health at Work plan, regular in-house campaigns, delivering Mental Health Awareness training to all people managers and increasing the number of Mental Health champions.



1 Produce, implement and communicate a mental health at work plan, drawing from best practice and representing the views of employees across the organisation, specifically exploring feedback from people with mental health problems.

Why have a mental health at work plan?

Today, more employers realise that supporting mental health is good for people and business. Producing, implementing and sharing a mental health plan is a great way to improve everyone's wellbeing.

Results from Mind's Workplace Wellbeing 2018/19 Index showed that 71 per cent of employees experienced poor mental health at any time. Of those, 6 per cent would take time off for a mental health problem and 23 per cent would take time off for a physical health problem.

Your mental health at work plan should detail what support is available to employees if they are experiencing poor mental health, whether it is due to problems inside or outside of work. A poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, which may lead to sickness absence. Encouraging staff to work sensible hours, take full lunch breaks, rest and recuperate after busy periods, avoid working at weekends and take their full annual leave entitlement can all help avoid burnout.

What to include

Your mental health at work plan should help to create a positive culture where people feel able to talk about their mental health. Make sure your plan is written down to show your current and future employees that you care about their wellbeing. Your plan should include:

- how you will promote the wellbeing of all staff
- how you will tackle the work-related causes of mental health problems including routinely taking stock of the wellbeing of your staff
- how you will support staff experiencing poor mental health
- signposting to relevant sources of information and support both inside and outside your organisation

- clear objectives which are shaped around your organisational vision
- reference to the Equality Act 2010, acknowledging that mental health may be classified as a disability

Ensure that staff can easily access it at all times. Putting your plan in the staff handbook, on the intranet, website or hard copies around the office is an easy way to do this.

2 Demonstrate senior ownership and drive board-level accountability, underpinned by a clear governance structure for reporting.

Senior-level ownership

Senior buy-in, including at board level, is vital in order to send the clear message: “Employee wellbeing is a priority for this organisation.” Building it into governance structures, as something to be reported on, says unequivocally that your wellbeing activities are an integral part of doing business as usual, not an extra or a distraction.

Senior leaders should promote employee wellbeing by:

- speaking out about mental health frequently
- supporting a campaign to encourage healthy work behaviours
- signing the Time to Change Employer pledge
- including it on the boardroom agenda
- having senior level mental health champions
- adopting the Mental Health at Work Commitment

3 Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing using available data.

Using different types of data

Staff surveys:

Your staff survey can be a great tool to capture information about wellbeing. It will probably already ask staff about things like their workload, leadership and management, opportunities for personal development and internal communication. However, it may not make the links between these issues and the impact they have on employees' mental wellbeing. Think about how you can integrate mental health into the existing survey to generate this information.

Do you know how many of your staff have a mental health problem? A question in a staff survey can be a good way of capturing this data, reinforced by the message that your organisation will respond proactively and reassurance that their personal information will be kept confidential. A staff satisfaction survey can be a great tool to help you understand what affects your staff's wellbeing at work.

If you're responsible for a local authority housing service, can your staff survey results be analysed to highlight information about housing roles?

Team mental health audits:

It's important managers regularly take stock of the mental health of their staff, the types of pressures they're under and how to alleviate them. A useful way of doing this is to carry out a regular mental health audit which allows staff to share their challenges and work together to identify solutions. More information on page 34 'How to take stock at a team level.'

HR data:

HR data can also be an important source of information on wellbeing. Sources you can use could include absenteeism data, staff turnover and exit interviews.

How often staff take sickness absence, and the reasons they give for it, can provide some useful clues about mental health. However, don't make assumptions without getting the whole picture.

Be particularly careful if mental health isn't often spoken about at work. Just because staff don't give mental health problems as the reason for being absent doesn't mean these don't exist. It could be that people just don't feel comfortable sharing problems because of the reaction they'll get.

A Mind poll found that 95 per cent of employees calling in sick with stress give a different reason for their absence. This is why it is vital that managers routinely ask staff how they are doing and discuss their mental health - it helps build up people's confidence to speak up earlier on and get the help they need sooner. Increased employee confidence to disclose their mental health also helps to ensure reliability in HR data.

4 Seek feedback from your employees and create clear opportunities to make improvements based on feedback.

Ask your staff

Designing your plan with input from employees boosts buy-in and gives you a clearer idea of the support they might need. If your organisation is quite large you may prefer to set up a smaller group of staff for initial consultations and another group to feedback on the finished plan. Building your plan with input from employees from across the organisation builds their commitment to supporting their own mental health and that of their colleagues. Trust and integrity are key drivers of engagement. Organisations that support staff reap the benefits in terms of loyalty and commitment from employees.

Before you begin, explain why you're developing the plan, future plans for roll-out and review, and why employees' views matter. This conversation doesn't end when the plan's finished. Set up regular communication, so you can keep asking people what works and tweaking your level of support in response. You could also consider asking other organisations in your sector for best practice ideas.

Commitment two

Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes.

Grand Union Housing Group case study

Grand Union Housing Group moved to their Milton Keynes offices in September 2019. Their carefully planned communication campaign had started more than eight months previously, and they'd consulted widely through open meetings, team meetings, blogs on the popular intranet, and a network of change champions who got involved with everything from choosing colours to the details of desk design. They'd set the changes in their strategic context, agreed transition support, and worked hard to meet colleagues' needs.

The move itself was supported with an app, for both business and personal mobiles. It included important information like local travel information and 'how to' videos to help people manage their journeys and settle into the new workplace. However, even with the high levels of consultation and engagement, there were bound to be some issues that only became clear once people had moved in. For example, the lights in the contact centre had been hung low to allow space for acoustic panels. The resulting glare caused headaches, adding to the stress of handling sensitive calls.

Luckily, the change champions and a discussion board on the intranet provided clear, simple and safe channels for raising concerns. The budget had included funds for resolving unforeseen problems, and the workspace was redesigned within days, to provide a comfortable and calm environment. As staff settle into their new workspaces, these routes have remained in place to provide 2-way communication on everything related to the new offices.





Provide employees with good physical workplace conditions

Workplace triggers for poor mental health

Typical workplace triggers for stress and mental health problems include:

- long hours and no breaks
- unrealistic expectations or deadlines
- overly pressurised working environments
- unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work
- inability to use annual leave
- a poor physical working environment
- high-risk roles
- lone working
- poor relationships with managers
- poor relationships with colleagues
- poor internal communication
- poor managerial support
- job insecurity or poorly managed change
- bullying
- financial worries

Physical working environment

Employees should have access to natural light, a quiet room if they need space, comfortable work stations with ability to adjust equipment if required, good air quality and access to water.

Noise levels, space, temperature and light can significantly affect staff wellbeing.

In your mental health at work plan set out how you will create a good working environment for staff by:

- consulting with employees on how to improve the work environment and take action to ensure it is suitable
- providing space dividers and quiet spaces for when employees need to carry out focused work
- reaching an agreement on respectful behaviours to help manage noise levels

2 Create opportunities for employees to feed back when work, culture and conditions are driving poor mental health.

Involve staff in dialogue and decision making to create a culture of openness

When staff feel involved and well informed about what's happening in the organisation, it increases motivation and helps people understand how their role fits into the bigger picture.

As housing providers, our work is often shaped by government policy, or by local politics. Although political decisions may be outside our control, there may be choices about how we respond to policy. Even if we don't have influence, it is helpful to make sure staff understand what is driving changes that affect their work.

Your action plan should set out how you will involve staff by using methods such as:

- staff surveys and focus groups
- staff forums and diversity networks
- engagement steering groups
- monthly or quarterly policy updates
- performance review meetings
- improvement or planning 'away days'
- regular group problem-solving meetings or innovation events
- work-stream groups that bring together different parts of the organisation
- feeding back board decisions to all staff
- effectively using internal communication channels.

Importance of job design

Employees should feel a level of autonomy and control over their work so it is helpful for employers to organise tasks, processes and structures. This includes clearly communicating roles and responsibilities and making sure any changes are discussed if and when they occur. Other key elements include ensuring variety within roles, providing sufficient resources for employees to be able to fulfil their role successfully and identifying any physical, emotional and psychological demands of the job so that extra support can be provided if required. In addition, job design should support work/life balance – in order to do this organisations can have in place flexible working opportunities including working from home.

It is widely recognised that employees of certain high risk occupations can be exposed to frequent traumatic events. In housing organisations, this may be less frequent and less visible. For example, rehousing teams may be involved in witness protection arrangements, or the staff monitoring care alarms may need to maintain contact with vulnerable residents while they await emergency services. Preventative measures and adequate support should be put in place for all staff that may be involved in traumatic events.

- 3 Address the impact that a range of activities have on employees, including organisational design and redesign, job design, recruitment, working patterns, email, 'always-on' culture, and work-related policies.

Wider organisational policies

It would also be helpful to carry out a review of other policies and practices that shape staff wellbeing. Check that mental wellbeing is at the heart of other policies relating to staff wellbeing such as health and safety, working time, sickness absence and return-to-work.

Tackling unhealthy workplace practices – impact of digital working patterns, emails, always-on culture

It can be easy for employees to get into bad work habits without realising the implications on their mental health, so workplaces should try to encourage healthy behaviours among their staff.

With more and more people working remotely, employees may develop an 'always-on' feeling. But creating a culture where staff feel comfortable enough to switch off at the end of the work day and take short breaks during the day is beneficial. This could include avoiding sending emails outside working hours, ensuring workloads are manageable and making sure staff take lunch breaks rather than eating at their desk.

4

Give permission to have work-life balance and to work flexibly and agilely.

Promoting a healthy work/life balance

Long hours might seem manageable in the short term. But over time, constant pressure and a poor work/life balance can quickly lead to stress and burnout, reducing people's productivity, performance, creativity and morale.

Your mental health at work plan should set out how your organisation encourages staff to:

- work sensible hours
- take full lunch breaks
- rest and recuperate after busy periods
- avoid working at weekends – especially from home
- take their full annual leave entitlement.

Working flexibly

Giving people some control over where, when and how they work can help everyone be more healthy and productive. For example, it can help an employee manage stress by allowing a later start time twice a week so they can exercise. You can achieve this by creating a flexible working policy. Flexible working can be a vital early intervention to prevent mental health problems from getting worse and resulting in sickness absence. It can also help staff who've been absent return to work gradually. Wherever possible, senior leaders and managers should be role models for healthier work habits and encourage staff by example.

- 5** Encourage openness during recruitment and throughout employment so appropriate support can be provided.

Offering the right support at different stages

Stage one - recruitment

Supporting mental health starts with getting the right person for the job. If there's a mismatch between a new recruit and your workplace, or their skills and abilities and your business needs, it can lead to intense stress. Always be realistic about the role in interviews, and be careful to select people on their skills and competencies, or realistic potential. Some top tips for providing an effective recruitment process include:

- Communicate the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities during the recruitment process, including in the job advert
- Provide guidelines and, where possible, training for staff involved in recruitment to ensure that candidates are not discriminated against at any stage
- Make it clear in adverts and interviews that the organisation values staff mental health, as this sends a signal that disclosure will not lead to discrimination. For example, include a statement such as: 'As an employer we are committed to promoting and protecting the physical and mental health of all our staff'
- State clearly that reasonable adjustments are available – for the interview and the job itself – so applicants understand why disclosure might be beneficial
- Ensure people can disclose confidentially and that any information about health or disability is kept separate from the application form, so the recruitment panel does not see it

Stage two - induction

Delivering an effective induction programme is essential. Starting a new role can feel unsettling, and if employees aren't given the right expectations and guidance, it can destroy their confidence and trigger existing mental health problems. At this stage, make sure you are providing information about what support is available for staff to look after their mental health and wellbeing. This will send a message that mental health is a priority for your organisation.

Stage three - responding to disclosure

If someone tells you they have a mental health problem, or you think they do, it's important that line managers have an early conversation about the person's needs. They should find a safe, quiet place to talk to them about their needs so the right level of support can be provided, including necessary adjustments. Although managers are not clinical specialists, they should have access to signposting information so that they can listen and signpost staff to the right support.

This is where good people management skills, plus empathy and common sense, are essential. Managers need to ensure they are seen as approachable and listen when staff ask for help. They should also be mindful of whether people would feel safe sharing their problem at work.

Stage four - supporting an employee when they are unwell and off sick

Sometimes an employee may be so unwell they need time off work to recover. How well you manage sickness absence is key in shaping how well and how quickly people are able to return to work and get back to feeling healthy and able to work again.

Here are some types of mental health problems that an employee may request time off for:

mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/

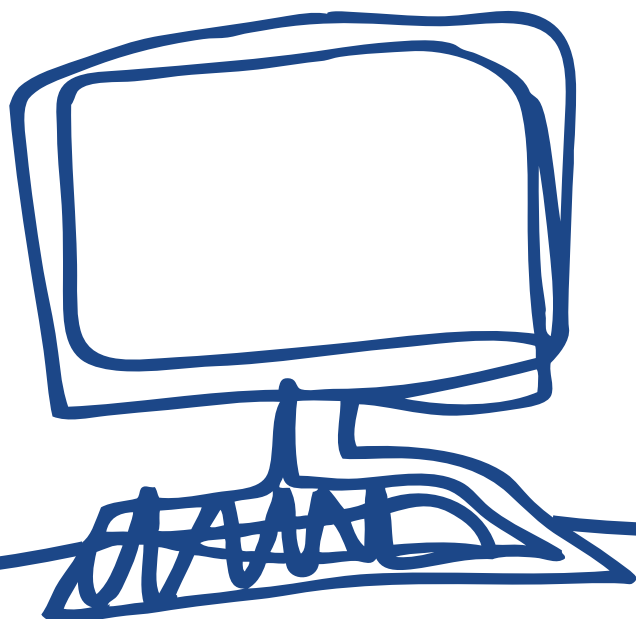
Stage five - supporting people to return to work

Effective return-to-work interviews can ensure mental health problems are identified at an early stage before they get worse. However, to be effective, managers must understand how to use them to build trust and engagement. Before the interview, make sure managers tell people what to expect in advance. Make it clear that it's a supportive way to help them make a successful and lasting return to the workplace and address any on-going health needs.

It may be helpful to refer an employee with mental health problems to an occupational health professional. Occupational health will work with them to create a plan detailing their condition and the type of support they may need to return to work.

Fit for Work [fitforwork.org](https://www.fitforwork.org) provides impartial work-related health advice and can refer you to occupational health professionals for support in returning to work.

Take a look at Mind's [mind.org.uk/media/550657/resource4.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media/550657/resource4.pdf) for more information on how to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem, including how to manage an employee's time off sick and return to work.



Commitment three

Promote an open culture around mental health.

Riverside Group case study

Enable, Riverside Groups's long-standing staff group supporting colleagues with physical disabilities, changed its focus recently to include those struggling with their mental health – aiming to truly achieve the group's tagline 'enabling you to work to the best of your ability'

In May 2017, Riverside signed the Time to Change Employer Pledge, including a commitment to stamp out the stigma of mental health in the workplace and create a safe environment for colleagues to openly talk about mental health.

Initially intending to recruit 20 mental health champions from across the organisation, they were overwhelmed by the response, and ended up recruiting 70. Thanks to awareness and wellbeing incentives through Enable, this number has grown to more than 220.

To protect their own wellbeing, these volunteers work within clear boundaries. For example, each champion only supports a maximum of four individuals at any one time. As a national organisation, Riverside decided that an online toolkit should be part of the range of resources to help support and guide the champions in their role. The toolkit includes all kinds of useful things, such as FAQs to give an idea of the kind of issues they might encounter, and personal safety plans they can give to colleagues.

As part of Riverside's Lean on Me campaign, champions can support each other and share best practice at regular networking sessions in local offices. They're also encouraged to keep a reflective practice diary so they can look back on their interactions with colleagues and think about ways they might be able to handle certain situations differently in future.

All these practices help champions to feel supported — when they feel supported they can provide the best support to others.

1

Proactively change the way people think and act about mental health by increasing awareness and challenging mental health stigma.

Raise awareness of mental health

In many workplaces mental health is the elephant in the room. Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and problems can spiral.

Your mental health at work plan should aim to raise awareness of mental health by:

- embedding mental health in induction and training
- celebrating key dates in the mental health calendar
- running internal communication campaigns
- recruiting Mental Health Champions.

How stigma impacts staff wellbeing

With 1 in 4 British workers affected by conditions like anxiety, depression and stress every year, mental health is a significant issue your organisation cannot afford to ignore. 9 out of 10 people who experience mental health problems say they face stigma and discrimination as a result. 60 per cent of people say that stigma and discrimination are as damaging, or more damaging, than the symptoms of their mental health problem, and 54 per cent of people say they are impacted most by such stigma in their place of work.

In housing organisations, where many of our tenants and other customers may suffer from poor mental health, it's particularly important that we are open and supportive in the way we talk about mental health. Negative language and unhelpful stereotypes add to the stigma faced by staff as well as tenants.

Too often, employees are scared to talk to their manager and problems can spiral. By raising awareness of mental health, and encouraging discussion, you can challenge this harmful culture.

Five ways to tackle stigma in your organisation

- 1 Help people understand mental health.**

Improving mental health awareness is the best way to beat stigma. Provide staff with reliable information – Mind's website is a great place to start.
- 2 Talk about mental health.**

Talk about mental health. It's easy to believe there's no right place to talk about mental health. But the more we talk about it, the better life is for all of us.
- 3 Share your experience.**

If you have a story to share you can help improve people's understanding and change their attitudes. People follow leaders' behaviour, so lead by example.
- 4 Support co-workers and colleagues.**

Put in place, and shape, mental health programmes and policies at work. Play your part and others will follow.
- 5 Recruit Mental Health Champions.**

Champions are self-appointed employees at any level of your organisation who help challenge stigma and change the way employees think and act about mental health.

Sign the Time to Change Employer pledge

The Time to Change Employer Pledge is a commitment an organisation takes to put in place best-practice interventions and policy to help your staff work in ways that promote a positive mental wellbeing. Over 1,200 organisations, including leading housing associations, employing more than 2 million people, have now signed the pledge. It is free of charge and available to organisations based in England.

To find out more and register your interest visit: <https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/get-involved/get-your-workplace-involved/employer-pledge>

2 Empower employees to champion mental health and positively role model in the workplace.

Recruit employee champions

Employee champions take action in the workplace to raise awareness of mental health problems and challenge mental health stigma. They may or may not have personal experience with mental health, but the role should be open to everyone within your workplace and aim to bring together people with different perspectives and experiences – this is a really important way to challenge the stigma around mental health problems.

The main criteria to consider when recruiting employee champions is:

- that they should care strongly about challenging the stigma, discrimination and negative stereotypes associated with mental health problems.
- have time to take on some anti-stigma activity (this can be as little or much as they would like or are able to do).
- they should also be willing to engage colleagues constructively and positively when taking action to challenge mental health stigma, for example, helping people understand how they can look after their mental health and wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

3 Encourage open two-way conversations about mental health and highlight the support available at all stages of employment.

Use two-way communication

Poor communication can cause stress. Staff can be affected if they are:

- overloaded with information they can't process.
- excluded from key knowledge and conversations.
- unable to tell managers how they're feeling.

If communication is clear, open, effective, manageable and responsive, staff will be able to access all the information they need to do their job while avoiding overload.

Creating a Wellness Action Plan (WAP) is a great tool to promote two-way conversation. A WAP is an easy, practical way of helping you support your own mental health at work, and if you are a manager, helping you to support the mental health of your team members. Support yours and your teams' mental health with our guides –

Find out more and get your guide here:

mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-your-staff/employer-resources/wellness-action-plan-download/

Offering mental health support

Supporting staff's mental health isn't just a one-off action. Having open conversations about, and offering support for, mental health should happen from recruitment to returning to work after absence.

If you're an HR manager or senior leader, think about:

- What support is provided for staff experiencing a mental health problem?
- Do employees have a good understanding of how mental health is managed in the workplace and what support is available?
- Do you provide stress coaching?

Commitment four

Increase organisational confidence and capability.

Capsticks case study

Capsticks LLP work extensively in the social housing sector. They have long been a supporter of mental health in the workplace and in May 2019 they signed the Mindful Business Charter to further their commitment. The Mindful Business Charter has been developed to change working practices that can affect mental health and wellbeing. Its foundation is the four pillars of mental health:

- Openness & Respect
- Smart meetings and mailings
- Respecting rest periods
- Mindful delegation

The Charter is adaptable, and Capsticks have been able to use the principles to develop their own wellness strategy. This has included:

- training mental health first aiders across all offices
- encouraging everyone to “take leave as leave” so that they genuinely have a break
- including wording within email signatures that whilst some employees may action emails outside of working hours, this is not expected in return
- implementing and encouraging the use of a genuinely flexible working policy
- undertaking honest surveys across partners and legal directors to understand where they can develop to support their employees

Capsticks also recognise the benefit of informal strategies. Across their offices nationwide they’ve rolled out various projects such as tea and biscuit breaks before office meetings; office fitness groups; bring your dog to work pilots; and book clubs. These informal initiatives encourage employees to spend time away from their desks, speak to others in the firm and find time for a work life balance during the day.

As part of Capsticks’ open and inclusive environment, their senior leadership team share their own experiences with mental health, along with many others across the firm. This helps to remove stigma and normalise discussions on mental health in the workplace.



Increase mental health literacy of all staff and provide opportunities for staff to learn about how to manage their own mental health.

Building people's mental health literacy so they can support each other

Building mental health literacy means boosting employees' knowledge and skills so they better manage their own mental health and improve their ability to support that of others. Ensuring staff and managers have a good understanding of mental health, and the factors that affect workplace wellbeing, is essential for building a healthy, happy and productive workforce.

You can do this by:

- Embedding mental health in your induction and training: Ensure your staff are given information on how best to manage mental health and what support is available. You should detail this in your action plan.
- Raising the profile of mental health: why not invite a speaker on mental health to an event as part of diversity, disability or mental health awareness activities? Hearing what it's like to have a mental health problem from people who've experienced the issues first hand can help break down negative stereotypes.
- Making the most of internal communications: raise awareness through blogs, myth busters, factsheets, tips for managers, useful web links and FAQs. You can also use posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, magazines and intranet and internet pages to get the message out. The next section includes useful information you could share.
- Share these tips with staff to help them support their own wellbeing. [The Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) can also help.

It might be helpful to talk about what it looks like when a colleague is experiencing difficulties with their mental health. This could include things like negative perceptions of customers/tenants; being reluctant to take on responsibilities or get involved in problem solving; or becoming strongly focused on complying with processes, rather than achieving positive outcomes

Research shows that small and medium organisations often fall behind larger organisations when it comes to addressing mental health. Mind have designed a toolkit and free online training modules especially for smaller workplaces to help support mental health amongst their staff.

Toolkit: www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/toolkit/mental-health-for-small-workplaces/

- 2** Ensure all staff are suitably prepared and educated to have effective conversations about mental health, and where to signpost for support, including in inductions for all new staff.

How to have a conversation

Creating a workplace culture where employees feel comfortable and safe to be themselves without fear of discrimination will make it easier for them to speak about mental health and reach out when they need to. Inductions for new starters should signpost them for support available and include details of who they can speak to if they experience mental health problems.

Peer support programmes are also beneficial. This is where workplaces create a space or platform where colleagues offer a listening ear to anyone that might be experiencing mental health problems. However, getting people to access peer support can be a barrier, so things like newsletters and other promotional materials are important. A buddy system can also help, which is where peer supporters are placed in small groups and provide support and supervision to each other.

One of the easiest ways to support employees is to make sure people are aware of the help, tools and services available to them. But it's not just about signposting; actively promoting the use of wellbeing tools, mental health support and local and national services is a way of creating a culture in which these things are OK to talk about. Tools like wellness action plans can also be useful in making sure those conversations happen regularly between managers and line reports. Explore a range of toolkits that are useful when planning and delivering mental health support plans for your workforce. These include details to other services you can also use:

www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk

- 3 Train your line managers in spotting and supporting all aspects of mental health in the workplace, and include regular refresher training.

Training line managers

The way staff manage and support people experiencing a mental health problem can be key in shaping how they cope and recover.

Your organisation should:

- provide training on mental health and stress management – including how to spot the signs and how to have supportive conversations
- have clear guidelines for managers on managing mental health issues
- encourage and support positive manager behaviours.

Mind has a range of training courses to help you build plans to promote mental wellbeing in your organisation. These include both face to face training and online courses. Explore now to see which course would suit you. [mind.org.uk/workplace/training-consultancy/](https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/training-consultancy/)

4

Support managers to think about employee mental health in all aspects of their role including during staff inductions, one-to-one meetings, team meetings and return-to-work meetings.

Regular one-to-ones

Regular one-to-one meetings and catch-ups are a great place to ask your staff how they're getting on. Doing so regularly will help build trust and give employees a chance to raise problems at an early stage.

Ask your team members how one-to-ones can be tailored to suit their needs. Employees should also be able to request a meeting outside the normal schedule if they need to discuss anything important. Regular one-to-ones have significant benefits for employers, employees and the bottom line.

Benefits of one-to-ones

- boosting employee engagement and building mutual trust
- identifying issues early, so employees can get the support they need
- ensuring employee wellbeing is monitored throughout the organisation.

How to take stock of wellbeing at a team level

Regularly carry out mental health audits:

If your organisation has a staff survey which asks about employee experience, organisational culture and mental health, you may be able to gather information about your team's wellbeing. With HR support, you could take this further, by holding a session at a team meeting.

You could ask your team:

- what they think a mentally healthy team looks like
- what they already do well to promote good mental health, and how you can build on this together if anything is having a negative impact on the team's mental wellbeing.
- Ask team members to group these issues under the following headings:
 - > what do we have control over?
These can then be captured as part of your action plan
 - > what can we influence?
These can then be captured as part of your action plan
 - > what issues are beyond our control or influence?
These can be captured as issues that need to be acknowledged, with the appropriate policies and procedures implemented, to minimise the negative impact on tenants. This in turn makes issues manageable and less stressful on housing staff who work with the tenants directly.



Commitment five

Provide mental health tools
and support.



Raise awareness of the resources and tools available, including the Mental Health at Work website.

TOOLKIT

Supporting healthcare workers' mental health

When your work is focused on caring for others, it's perhaps all the more important that you feel able to speak openly about your own mental health, and seek support when you need it. And, at a time when recruiting and retaining staff is critical for NHS organisations, the need to consider staff wellbeing is all the more obvious.

Staff must feel able, rather than obligated, to stay in work

In a guest blog written for Mental Health at Work, NHS Employers' Chief Executive Danny Mortimer, is clear: "Staff must feel able, rather than obligated, to stay in work if they are experiencing mental ill health." In other words, it's not just about whether people can have time off: it's about creating the conditions whereby work is a supportive environment where NHS staff can thrive.



So, we asked the team at [NHS Employers](#) to share the key principles, tools and resources they'd recommend.

Line managers are a key part of this, as these are the people who staff ought to be able to

The screenshot shows a search interface with filters for 'Ideas to improve work', 'Resource type', 'Format', 'Workplace settings', 'Sector', 'Workplace', 'Role', and 'Size of organisation'. Search results include 'Address your stress toolkit' from MHFA England and 'Community's mental health charter' from community.

MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK

Your first step for better Mental Health at Work

Whether you work with 10 people, 10,000 people or just yourself, paying attention to mental health in the workplace has never been more important. Mental Health at Work is here to help you find the information and resources you need.

Get started ↓



I talk openly about it in the hope I give people the confidence to be able to come forward

Darren, from the London Fire Brigade, has suffered from mental ill health for as long as he can remember. However, being able to talk about the stresses he experiences has helped him a lot.



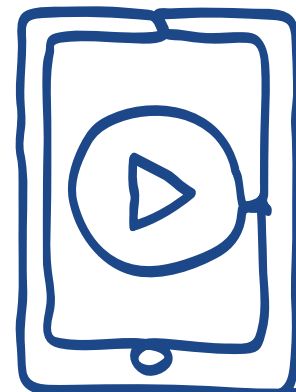
He now visits London Fire Brigade stations and departments to talk about his experiences. With help from senior officers and his commissioner, he has set up a mental health support group for staff and their families, named United Minds.

Start finding resources

If you're not sure where to start, make a few choices below to help us point you in the right direction for your organisation.

I'm looking for

- Support for line managers, colleagues & staff
- Ways to assess my organisation's approach
- Ideas to improve workplace culture
- Help to develop policy and practice



2 Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help, including digital support, occupational health, employee assistance programmes and the NHS.

Some employees might be struggling with mental health problems and so may need support from external mental health services or other practical support. Both internal and external support should be detailed in your organisational mental health at work plan.

You can provide support in-house or buy in additional support for employees. This could include:

- access to Cognitive behavioural therapy (including through digital platforms)
- counselling through Access to Work, a Government run programme.
- Occupational health
- Employee assistance programmes and other tailored mental health and wellbeing support.

Some employers extend support to organisations in their supply chain, particularly smaller employers, to help them improve the mental health of their employees.

Different ways to support staff

The table below shows examples of different support that could be made available to staff, inside and outside of your organisation.

| Internal support | External support |
|---|--|
| Internal mental health or wellbeing groups | Employee Assistance Programmes |
| Peer support groups | Occupational Health |
| Internal wellbeing or mental health network for people to share experiences and tips for managing mental health and wellbeing at work | Signposting to local voluntary sector providers, such as local peer support groups and online peer support |
| Formal or informal buddying systems for people to have the opportunity to talk to someone other than their managers | Free or subsidised private medical insurance |
| Mental health first aiders or Mental Health Champions employees can talk to if they are struggling | Signposting to medical services, such as NHS services or another healthcare provider |

3

Provide targeted support around key contributors of poor mental health.

There are a number of key contributors and triggers that can lead to poor mental health at work, both personal and work related. Identifying these potential triggers and putting into place tailored support for employees is essential to creating a safe and secure working environment. Some key contributors include:

- Financial security
- Trauma
- Relationship breakdown
- Bereavement
- Organisational change
- Having children
- Physical safety risks
- Bullying

Further to this, recognising when an employee might be experiencing poor mental health would be the first step to providing support. Some signs to spot can include:

- Tiredness
- Irritability and/or hostility
- Erratic behaviour and mood swings
- Inability to focus
- Difficulty remembering things
- Sudden weight loss/gain
- Loss of confidence
- Lack of care over appearance
- Frequent illnesses
- Increased absence

Centre for Financial Education case study

Teaming up with the Centre for Financial Education (CFED), Longhurst Group offers colleagues free access to up-to-date financial information.

Having worked with CFED for several years, the Group has received consistently positive feedback from colleagues who have used the service. For some, the results have been life changing.

Entirely confidential and free to use, the service provides impartial information that gives colleagues the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions or ask the right questions about their finances.

Colleagues receive regular access to a team of financial experts who provide coaching, advice and peace of mind on things like mortgages, pensions, retirement and general finances.

Commitment six

Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting.



Currently, there is little awareness of the impact of mental health-related absence in the social housing sector.

In a 2019 survey of CIH members,

only 16 per cent

of respondents could put a number on the working days lost to their organisation due to causes such as stress, anxiety and depression.



1 Identify and track key measures for internal and external reporting, including through the annual report and accounts.

2 Measure organisational activity and impact using robust external frameworks, for example Mind's workplace wellbeing index and the Business in the Community responsible business tracker.

Producing an annual wellbeing report

In commitment one we considered how to routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing by using HR data. The data you have collected can be used to produce an annual mental health and wellbeing report which can be shared internally with staff but also externally with key stakeholders and potential recruits. This will help increase accountability and encourage discussion.

However, it is important to ensure confidentiality. It's sensitive information, therefore in surveys make sure you don't ask any questions which might identify an individual such as name, address or email. Create strict policies to ensure this and emphasize that the survey is anonymous so you collect genuine experience and honest feedback. For further information on data protection see the Information Commissioner's Office.

Your report could include:

- a statement on your commitment to adopting the mental health core standards
- initiatives currently in place and priorities for the future
- evidence of the impact of your initiatives or support through case studies and data like staff survey results, sickness absence and engagement in mental health activities.

Signposting to index

Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index is a benchmark of best policy and practice. It will help you find out where you are doing well and where you could improve your approach to mental health in the workplace. It can also help you gain public recognition for what you're doing, and find out where you benchmark in comparison to peers and other participating organisations.

mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/



Chartered
Institute of
Housing

We're Mind, the mental health charity.
We want to support a million people
to stay well and have good mental
health at work by 2021.

Be part of our movement for change in workplace
mental health.

work@mind.org.uk

mind.org.uk



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