

# Employee Wellbeing Strategy 2021 - 2022



... Looking after everyone's wellbeing



South Tyneside Council

South  
Tyneside *Homes*

South Tyneside Council's  
Housing Company

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**THIS IS  
SOUTH  
TYNESIDE**



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# Health inequalities in the Borough



## Population in South Tyneside

will increase by 6% in the next 20 years – an increase of 40% in people aged 65 and over and 70% in those aged 80+



Stop smoking quit rate is 44.7% (2019/20)



**77.0 years**

male life expectancy at birth (compared to 79.8 average across England) (2017-19)



**81.8 years**

female life expectancy at birth (compared to 83.4 average across England) (2017-19)



**69.2%** of adults were classified as overweight or obese (2018/19)



**23.3%** of people are physically inactive (2018/19)



**52%** of people are increasing / high risk drinkers



**983 per 100,000**

population hospital admissions were alcohol related (2018/19)

## Introduction

At South Tyneside Council and South Tyneside Homes, we are proud of our Borough and we are ambitious for residents and our workforce. With many of us living and working in South Tyneside, we all care deeply about improving our place based assets and achieving the best possible outcomes for everyone. This collective passion and pride in what we do is our greatest asset. Together, we can ensure that South Tyneside is an outstanding place to live, work and raise families.

Employee wellbeing is an integral part of good business practice. Responsibility for the health and wellbeing of our workforce extends far beyond a core responsibility to provide a safe working environment. We are striving to be excellent employers, 'employers of choice' and we recognise the concept of 'good work' – work which is healthy and safe and offers the individual some influence over how the work is done and as a consequence an increasing sense of self-worth.

The TUC's report "Great Jobs in Great Places", identified that every job should be a great job. For us that means our employees will be paid fairly; work in a safe and healthy environment; be treated decently and with respect; have regular hours; have the chance to be represented by trade unions and be consulted on what matters at work; get the chance to learn and progress at work and to get on in life.

As a large proportion of our workforce are also residents of South Tyneside, improving the health and wellbeing of our employees will also support improvements in health and wellbeing across the Borough.

We have all seen a dramatic change to our lives in 2020, in a very short space of time almost over night a number of us began working from home. Within a few weeks digital solutions were found to replace the more traditional ways we were working, however this has brought both opportunities and challenges for us all.

The current pandemic has obviously created new challenges for ensuring the wellbeing of the workforce some of which are still emerging and are likely to for sometime. It is more important than ever that we take care of ourselves and help support others.

Support has also been provided to employees who have been physically attending work throughout the pandemic to ensure all our workplaces are covid secure and safe for everyone.

All of Us - Delivering Better Health and Wellbeing (the South Tyneside Public Health Annual Report 2018/19), includes extensive information on health inequalities in the Borough.

Our approach in developing this strategy, provides everyone with the opportunity to get involved in making their workplace a healthier place which means everyone can make a difference for themselves and for each other. Health and wellbeing is our shared goal and this strategy sets out our plans to achieve that goal.

This will include an equal focus on mental health and physical wellbeing. We will be less concerned about the distinctions between work and non-work related issues, but will focus on ensuring appropriate signposting of managers and employees to appropriate resources and in particular attempting to remove the stigma associated with such conditions.

Through the strategy and the supporting action plan, we will provide a framework for the Council and South Tyneside Homes to take a proactive and engaging approach to enhancing the health and wellbeing of our employees. Health and wellbeing is a long term challenge for us all however, we hope that there are some quick wins resulting from this strategy which employees will feel makes an impact on them:

- more employees finding out about health issues
- individuals getting involved in health initiatives
- reduced absence from work

We will do this through planned wellbeing initiatives, employee support mechanisms and joint working with employees, trade unions and other groups and networks.

## What is Workplace Wellbeing?

Workplace wellbeing places employee physical, mental, and social health high on our agenda. Wellbeing means different things to different people at different times. There are a number of definitions about what 'wellbeing' means and our chosen one is from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) which defines wellbeing as:

“Creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation” (CIPD 2016).

Workplace wellbeing is known to have a positive impact on happiness, engagement, recruitment and productivity. Improving the wellbeing of our employees will improve the wellbeing of their families and the wider communities we serve.

## What does a Healthy Workplace look like?

Being an 'employer of choice':

- an environment where health risks are identified and managed.
- a place where work is designed taking into account peoples' needs.
- an environment which actively supports health and wellbeing.
- a culture that creates conditions for innovation, creativity and appropriate attitude to risk.
- an organisation which trains managers to play a key role in supporting and taking responsibility for the wellbeing of their employees.

Health and wellbeing is a fundamental part of the culture within the organisations and is embedded into everything we do. The nature and type of jobs that employees do are vitally important in terms of job satisfaction, personal motivation, reward and control. The role and skill set of our managers is key. Good line management can have a positive affect on health, wellbeing and improved performance. A positive attitude and wellbeing enhances productivity through the release of potential talent. Our managers have a role in identifying and supporting people with health conditions to help them to carry on with their responsibilities or consider opportunities and adjustments where necessary. Keeping people in/at work has a positive affect generally on their wellbeing.

We have also done a great deal of work to ensure all our workplaces are covid secure and safe for all employees to work in during the current pandemic.

## Working At Home

As a number of employees are likely to be working at home during the current pandemic and this is likely to continue for a number of staff on a medium to long term basis. We recognise how it may affect our mental and physical health and ensure we are taking care of ourselves and our colleagues.

There are a number of key issues we should be aware of when working at home:

- maintain a positive work / life balance, taking regular breaks and segregating work from home life.
- workstation set up is important and managers are able to provide the support needed to ensure employees have the right equipment to support them while working from home.
- home working can be very isolating, so check in with others regularly, visual means of communication are great ways to keep in touch.
- wellness Action Plans (WAPs) are good for colleagues and managers to monitor their mental health.
- HR Training have also launched a suite of Health and Wellbeing virtual training sessions which includes Emotional Health & Wellbeing, Brilliance at Resilience, Stress Awareness (Managing Covid and managing working from home).
- internal Support available to all colleagues from HR, Health & Safety, Occupational Health, Public Health, Counselling Service, Trade Unions.

There is also a range of external support available via a number of different organisations including: MIND, Gov.UK: Mental Health & Wellbeing during Coronavirus, Samaritans, Charlie Waller Trust, South Tyneside Lifecycle: Mental Health Service, Mental Health Foundation UK.

*Further information on the support available is included via the Looking After Your Mental Health intranet Page.*

## What are the aims of the Employee Wellbeing Strategy?

This Employee Wellbeing Strategy sets out the ways in which we can further strengthen and support our workforce, to ensure that we empower them to continuously look after their own health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing produces positive attitudes, engagement, motivation and innovative thinking. It is an important factor in building employee engagement and is key to what we are striving to achieve. We are committed to continuing to address barriers to wellbeing as well as proactively identifying ways in which we can enhance employee wellbeing. This commitment is supported by elected members, trade unions and senior management.

The aims of this strategy are to have a workplace where we:

- Ensure our employees recognise the value we place on their health and wellbeing.
- Support and maintain a safe and healthy working environment.

- Improve the physical and mental wellbeing of our workforce.
- Encourage and support employees to maintain their own health and wellbeing and to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Support employees with health conditions to remain in work.
- Remove barriers that prevent employees with health conditions from achieving their potential.
- Improve employee morale.
- Improve people's health through being at work.

Successful delivery of these aims will, in turn, support the provision of improved outcomes for South Tyneside residents and an improved customer experience which links with Our Better Health and Wellbeing Strategy for South Tyneside (2017-21). and their vision to “Work in partnership to improve the health, wellbeing and quality of life for children, adults and families and reduce health inequalities, to help people live longer and healthier lives.”

## What are the benefits of an Employee Wellbeing Strategy?

### **Benefits for the Council and South Tyneside Homes:**

Investing in employee wellbeing can have a positive impact not only on the individual but also the organisation. Health and wellbeing is important because it leads to:

- Greater employee engagement and increased productivity.
- Improved attendance at work and a reduction in sickness absence rates and costs.
- Improved retention of employees, therefore reducing the cost of turnover and retaining skilled and experienced employees.
- Enhanced reputation as a service provider within the local community.
- Improved customer experience.
- Our employees being provided with the information to take responsibility for their own wellbeing.
- The reinforcement of the importance of our legal duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act “to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all”.
- Ensured all our workplaces are covid secure and safe for all employees to work in during the current pandemic.

### **Benefits to Our Employees:**

- Increased engagement through a feeling of being valued, listened to and treated fairly.
- The ability to deal with mental health in a more effective manner.
- Access to appropriate support and information to enable individuals to have the opportunity to look after their own health and wellbeing.
- Reduced levels of sickness absence and retaining jobs.
- Development opportunities with access to new training and learning opportunities.

## What Support and Information do we offer our Employees?

We already have a number of mechanisms and initiatives in place to support the health and wellbeing of our employees:

### • Occupational Health Service

Our Occupational Health Service provides advice and support on any health matters related to work. They aim to prevent work-related ill health and to improve employee wellbeing and performance.

### • Independent Counselling Service

Our employees have access to an excellent, free, independent and confidential Counselling Service. The Service supports employees experiencing psychological distress which is impacting on their health, wellbeing, attendance at work or their ability to successfully perform their role. The source of these difficulties may be work or home related. Our employees can access the Service whilst they are still at work which enables them to be supported and able to remain at work.

Feedback from our employees rates this Service as excellent.

### • Flu Campaign

Free flu vaccinations are offered every year to all employees. These are well received by our employees and this is shown in the number of people who take part.

### • Health Needs Assessment

By regularly undertaking an employee health needs assessment questionnaire, we work with employees to ensure we identify and minimise those issues which may impact negatively on their health.

### • Information and Training

We provide training, guidance and support to managers so they have the necessary skills, knowledge and ability to support our employees to improve their health and wellbeing. Information and training is also available to all employees. This is supported by improving links with our Public Health Team and using Health Advocates and Mental Health First Aiders to their full potential.

### • Better Health at Work Award

We are participating in the Better Health at Work Award which recognises the efforts of employers in the North East and Cumbria in addressing health issues within the workplace. The Council has already achieved the silver award and are well on our way to achieving the gold award. South Tyneside Homes are also actively working towards achieving this.

### • High Quality Accommodation

With our asset rationalisation programme, we have redesigned our corporate facilities, including South Shields Town Hall and provided our workforce with high quality spaces designed to promote productivity, collaboration and integration. We realise there is still work to do on our other workplaces but we are striving to improve working conditions across our portfolio of buildings. All buildings are covid secure to ensure the safety of all.

### • Work Life Balance and Flexible Working

Flexibility and 'flexible work' are terms used to describe a wide range of work styles and employment practices. They include all kinds of employment patterns which differ from the traditional nine to five full-time job. Getting the work-life balance right is extremely important for many of our employees who have personal responsibilities and interests outside of work.

We have introduced a range of policies to support them from flexible working hours to term time working and career breaks to 'stuck not sick' policies. We believe by offering flexibility in the way that our employees undertake their work can have a real and positive impact on both their individual performance and service delivery.

Over the last few months a large proportion of the workforce have had to change their way of working and embrace working from home, employees have been resilient in adapting to this change. Managers have been supporting their teams in a number of ways including providing the right equipment to allow working from home and support for their mental health.

Some Managers have been arranging regular Teams and Zoom calls with others finding more innovative ways to keeping in touch like socially distanced meetings in parks and open spaces when such meetings were allowed.

Training and support has been offered to managers in how to effectively manage teams remotely.

All Government advice has been followed in supporting employees to work from home; however, where employees have requested a return to work for mental health reasons, these have been facilitated.

### • Mental Health First Aiders

We are continuing to train a number of our employees to be Mental Health First Aiders. Their aim is create opportunities to start up conversations about mental health in the workplace, dispel myths, and make it easier for people to seek support. They have also been instrumental in supporting colleagues throughout the current pandemic

### • Health Advocates

We have also trained a number of our employees to be Health Advocates. They are there to help raise awareness of health topics and contribute to the development of a positive wellbeing culture by supporting people to make healthy choices and improve their health.

A number of events and campaigns have been arranged (working in partnership with our Public Health Team) which our Health Advocates have promoted within their service area, for example:

### - Healthy Eating – Sugar Display

A display of everyday food items on a family shopping list and the sugar they contained toured our buildings. Feedback from employees was excellent and very positive in promoting healthy eating and provoked a lot of conversations about what is in our food.

### - Alcohol

During Alcohol Awareness Week an interactive information stand was set up for employees to visit to try on beer goggles, see how many units and calories are in alcoholic drinks - this was to highlight the link between alcohol and obesity.

### - Physical Activity

Health Advocates have set up walk-in groups, couch to 5k and circuit training to list just a few.

## How we will deliver our Employee Wellbeing Strategy

The successful implementation of our Employee Wellbeing Strategy will be based on a partnership approach as follows:





Looking after everyone's wellbeing



**Key Theme 1 – Be Well**

Supporting healthy lifestyle choices and behaviours.



- Ensure we support employees to make healthier lifestyle choices and help change behaviours.



- Provide a safe and healthy working environment for all.
- Regularly review our HR policies and procedures.
- Provide support and reasonable adjustments when needed.
- Support Public Health National Campaigns and continue to strive towards the next level of the Better Health at Work Award.
- Continue to build on the current network of Health Advocates.
- Create a Wellbeing Page on the Intranet for employees to easily access all health and wellbeing information.
- Encourage managers to seek early advice and guidance from HR on the support and resources available for employees.
- Continue to provide free flu vaccinations for all employees.
- Supporting employees through the current pandemic.
- Suite of Health & Wellbeing Virtual Training available to all employees.



- Public Health events are well attended and feedback is positive.
- Successfully awarded the Better Health at Work Gold and Bronze Award.
- Developed network of Health Advocates and Mental Health First Aiders to help support and signpost managers and employees to the resources they need.
- Dedicated Wellbeing Page for employees to access via the intranet.
- Ensuring all our workplaces are covid secure and safe for employees to work in during the current pandemic.
- Employees attending the health and wellbeing virtual training on offer and providing good feedback.

**What we will do next**

Our Employee Wellbeing Strategy sets out three inter-related key themes which will support the delivery of our overall strategic priorities:

- **Be Well** – Supporting healthy lifestyle choices and behaviours.
- **Keep Well** – Ensuring employees have the right information and support to maintain good health.
- **Get Well** – Helping employees back to work following illness.

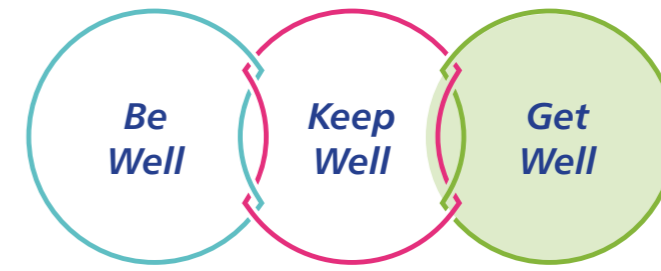
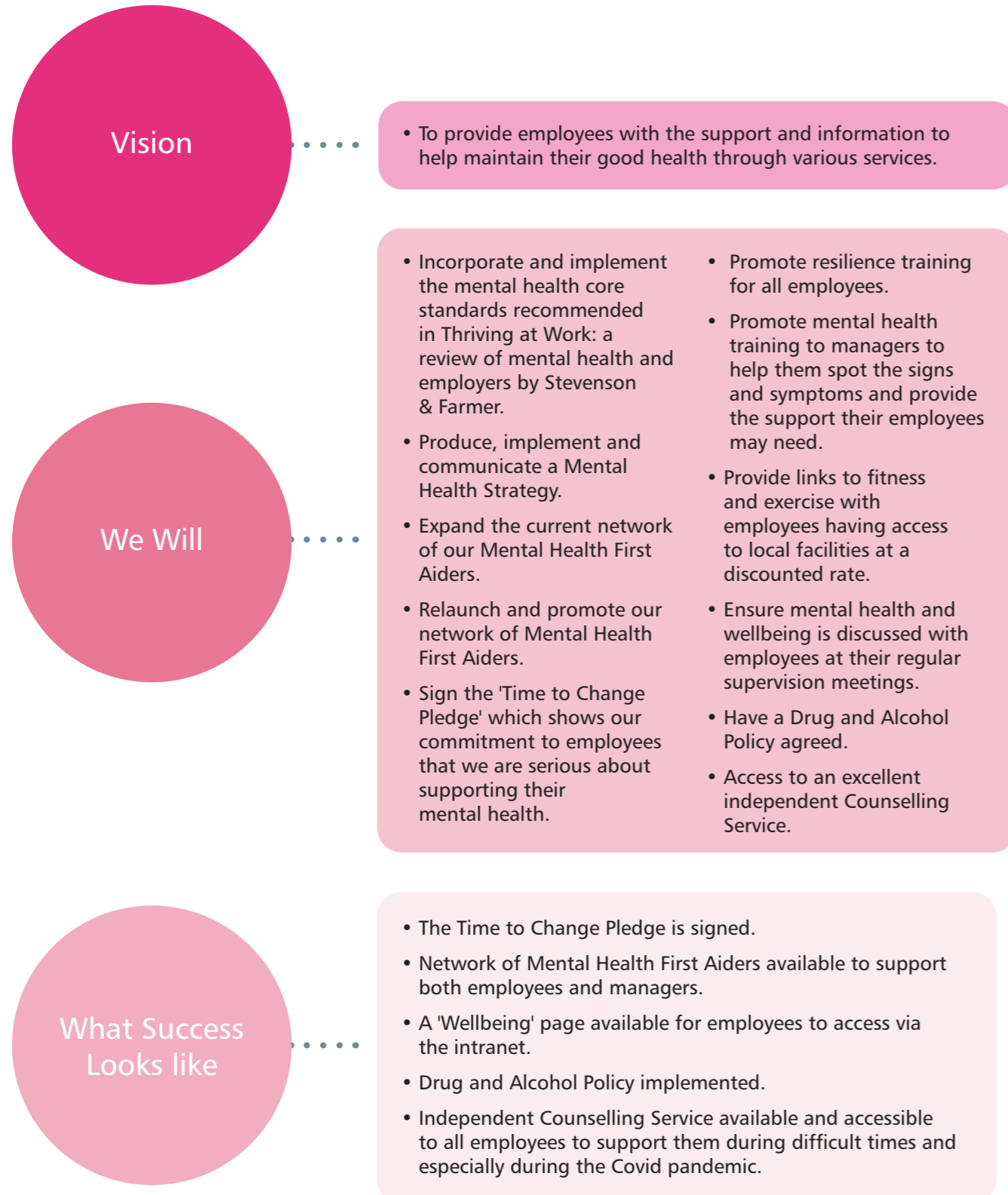
Each key theme details our aspirations and challenges and those areas we will focus on to realise this. An action plan will support the overall delivery of the Employee Wellbeing Strategy which will give clear objectives and timescales.





## Key Theme 2 – Keep Well

Ensuring employees have the right information and support to maintain good health.



## Key Theme 3 – Get Well

Helping employees back to work following illness.



## Our Annual Delivery Plan 2021

Key Theme 1 – Be Well		
Action	What we will do	When we will do it by
Develop the network of Health Advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the Health Advocates network across the organisations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Continue to develop the intranet page dedicated to health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to update resources available to all employees on the dedicated intranet page including details of case studies and signposting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Expanding colleague support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Champion the value of 121 discussions between managers and employees as an opportunity to support wellbeing at work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to work alongside our trade union colleagues to support our employees in the work place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop MHFA training programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to support and promote Public Health campaigns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental Health Guidance and Support to be included with the induction package.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Continue to develop the employee wellbeing strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific menopause training and the link to mental health available to all managers and employees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to offer people management skills training for all new and newly promoted managers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee Wellbeing Strategy to be agreed and presented to LTS, SLT, Workforce Consultative Forum and South Tyneside Homes Board.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 2021</li> </ul>

Key Theme 2 – Keep Well		
Action	What we will do	When we will do it by
Sign the 'Time to Change' Pledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present a briefing note to CLT on the commitment to sign the pledge.</li> <li>Encourage employees to show their support to the pledge by signing their own time to change individual pledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May 2021</li> </ul>
Expand the current network of Mental Health First Aiders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite the Mental Health First Aiders to quarterly meetings to discuss the ways to support and promote positive mental health.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing/ Quarterly</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise the profile of the Mental Health First Aiders across all buildings to increase awareness across the organisations on the support available. Poster campaigns, "Restroom Reading", use of the plasma screens and 'all employees' emails. Continue to raise the profile of mental health first aider.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train more employees to become Mental Health First Aiders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Improve our Mental Health Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft a Mental Health Strategy and raise mental health awareness among our employees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>April 2021</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build personal resilience in individuals through practical strategies, training and support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to offer a life worth living (suicide prevention) training to all employees through external partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Expanding Colleague Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to consider the physical environment for employees to encourage the development of spaces and workplaces that support wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities for employees to be better informed about their financial wellbeing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>April 2021</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training opportunities and information sessions for employees to help support them during the pandemic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>



## Key Theme 3 – Get Well

Action	What we will do	When we will do it by
Employee Wellbeing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee Wellbeing Strategy to be agreed and presented to LTS, CLT, Workforce Consultative Forum and South Tyneside Homes Board.</li> <li>Develop the network of Health Advocates and Mental Health First Aiders to raise awareness of health related issues within the workplace.</li> <li>Support the organisations to achieve the Better Health at Work Gold and Bronze Awards.</li> <li>Publicise anonymous case studies and success stories.</li> <li>More detailed advice from the Occupational Health Doctor to assist in supporting an employees earlier return to work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 2021</li> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>End of 2021</li> <li>April 2021</li> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>
Expanding Colleague Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote and deliver a wide range of health &amp; wellbeing training sessions across the organisation including, stress management, resilience, self awareness.</li> <li>Develop a package of support mechanisms to be published on intranet page.</li> <li>Support line managers to be able to effectively support employees with mental health issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>Ongoing</li> <li>Ongoing</li> </ul>

## Responsibility for Delivery

As an ambitious and high performing Council and a housing company that is on the path to excellence in all levels of service provision, we recognise the importance of reviewing and constantly adapting our approach to employee health and wellbeing. Our Employee Wellbeing Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan will be owned and led by our Corporate Leadership Team. The plan will be reviewed annually to keep the objectives relevant to the changing circumstances or opportunities that arise.

While our Senior Managers have accountability for the overall strategy implementation, day to day accountability for delivery sits with everyone. However, every employee has an essential role to play; we can only achieve this strategy and make our organisations a great place to work by working collaboratively.

## Measuring Success

This is a strategy to improve and maintain the health and wellbeing of all those who work in our organisations. It is important therefore to recognise that whilst there are some aspects of improved health and wellbeing that can be measured in the short term, of greater importance is consistent and constant improvement.