

Equality Impact Assessment Form **Reference –**

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| **Department** | Corporate Services | **Version no** | V0.2 |
| **Assessed by** | Chris Hardaker | **Date created** | 08/12/2023 |
| **Approved by** |  | **Date approved** |  |
| **Updated by** |  | **Date updated** | 19/12/2023 |
| **Final approval** |  | **Date signed off** |  |

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to

* eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
* advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
* foster good relations between different groups

# Section 1: What is being assessed?

**1.1 Name of proposal to be assessed.**

Not to renew the counselling contract with our external partner NOSS

**1.2 Describe the proposal under assessment and what change it would result in if implemented.**

The proposal is to not renew the long established external Occupational Health (OH) counselling support with Network of Support Staff (NOSS). This OH support is part of the Employee Health & Wellbeing service offer, as we do not have internal expertise. It offers clinical counselling support to council employees who are deemed to require this level of support with regards their mental health. This intervention helps/supports a return to work and or as a positive intervention to help an employee to stay in work without requiring sickness absence. This service supports the Council’s attendance strategy and sickness absence management.

This is a well-used support service and removing it means: -

* A reduced Employee Health & Wellbeing multidisciplinary service offer.
* Placing pressure on already strained NHS services where waiting times are lengthy.
* Other considerations
  + It is unclear if the free to use counselling services will be able offer the same level of clinical support as a professional clinical service such as NOSS.
  + Although there is a shift from face to face to remote support, it is unclear if the free/government led counselling services would offer face to face appointments. NOSS currently will do both as required by the nature of the case referred.
  + It is possible that future changes following the Government’s Department of Work and Pensions’ (DWP) Workplace Health consultation, may result in additional duties and or obligations being placed on employers to ensure the workplace health of their employees and offer a wider range of occupational health support interventions.

# Section 2: What the impact of the proposal is likely to be

* 1. **Will this proposal advance equality of opportunity for people who share a protected characteristic and/or foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not? If yes, please explain further.**

It is unclear if by not renewing the counselling support contract and removing it from the Employee Health & Wellbeing service (EHWB) there will be a benefit, other than a financial saving, which the Council needs to make.

This proposed change will not only affect those listed with protected characteristics as stated below, but any employee who may be having problems/concerns with their mental health and require support.

It could also add a difficulty for line managers to adhere to the attendance process, as the Council would be placing pressure on employees to seek external counselling support via NHS services, private or free counselling support and or VivUp (Employee Assistance Program (EAP)).

Employees who seek external counselling support including via the EAP, means that any feedback and or outcome reports given by the external support providers will not be seen by line management, unless the employee gives the consent for that information to be shared. This may have a knock on effect with attendance management and support, and could create strain in working relationships.

Currently employees are allowed access to counselling support via EHWB during works time, during working hours. It is unclear if the same approach would be adopted if this support intervention ends.

* 1. **Will this proposal have a positive impact and help to eliminate discrimination and harassment against, or the victimisation of people who share a protected characteristic? If yes, please explain further.**

No

* 1. **Will this proposal potentially have a negative or disproportionate impact on people who share a protected characteristic? If yes, please explain further.**

There is potential for this change to have a negative effect/impact on people who share a protected characteristic, as it could affect their mental health and wellbeing. There will be a greater emphasis to self-manage their mental health and the council could be viewed as not fully supporting their employees with regards to their mental health.

**2.4 Please indicate the level of negative impact on each of the protected characteristics?**

(Please indicate high (H), medium (M), low (L), no effect (N) for each)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Protected Characteristics:** | **Impact**  (H, M, L, N) |
| Age | M |
| Disability | M |
| Gender reassignment | M |
| Race | M |
| Religion/Belief | M |
| Pregnancy and maternity | M |
| Sexual Orientation | M |
| Sex | M |
| Marriage and civil partnership | M |
| **Additional Consideration:** |  |
| Low income/low wage | M |

**2.5 How could the disproportionate negative impacts be mitigated or eliminated?**

(Note: Legislation and best practice require mitigations to be considered, but need only be put in place if it is possible.)

Employers are required to manage workplace risk, implementing mitigations to help eliminate/manage risk. That would include workplace health.

As best practice, employers should offer suitable support interventions that promote workplace health or support staff to return to the workplace. All of which helps to reduce overall workplace absence and reduce costs of sick absence.

# Section 3: Dependencies from other proposals

**3.1 Please consider which other services would need to know about your proposal and the impacts you have identified. Identify below which services you have consulted, and any consequent additional equality impacts that have been identified.**

All departments and services within the Council, and all our external customers (schools and companies) will be affected by this change and reduced service offer. This potentially could have a significant risk to EHWB and their ability to trade externally.

# Section 4: What evidence you have used?

**4.1 What evidence do you hold to back up this assessment?**

None

**4.2 Do you need further evidence?**

None

# Section 5: Consultation Feedback

**5.1 Results from any previous consultations prior to the proposal development.**

consultations have not yet taken place.

**5.2 The departmental feedback you provided on the previous consultation (as at 5.1).**

See comment above.

**5.3 Feedback from current consultation following the proposal development (e.g. following approval by Executive for budget consultation).**

**5.4 Your departmental response to the feedback on the current consultation (as at 5.3) – include any changes made to the proposal as a result of the feedback.**