Briefing 16/06   February 2016

Growing the health and well-being agenda

To: all contacts

Key issues
What is well-being? – CIPD provide a definition
The benefits of putting a well-being strategy and action plan in place
Examples of practical initiatives

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1.   Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development issued a policy report titled 'Growing the health and well-being agenda: From first steps to full potential' in January 2016 and it is available here.

The document considers the wider context of wellbeing. It notes that well-being is a concept that includes physical, mental and social elements and so represents far more than an attempt to keep employees from becoming physically ill.

It is a useful document in two ways. Firstly, it contains some interesting pointers about what makes up a good approach to well-being and secondly, it reflects the advances many local authorities have made in addressing this agenda and reaping the benefits of doing so. APSE has recently produced a briefing looking at occupational health services which covers some linked issues.

2.   A definition

Well-being is not a new concept and is a wider approach than that traditionally taken to health and safety. The term is therefore open to interpretation and the report is helpful in that it states that 'Well-being is more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick. It represents a broader bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental and social health. Well employees are physically and mentally able, willing to contribute in the workplace and likely to be more engaged at work.'

The authors go on to state how 'well-being at work, therefore, is not merely about managing a physical and cultural environment with the limited aim of not causing harm to employees. It requires organisations to actively assist people to maximise their physical and mental health. The well-being approach also brings benefits for people at all levels inside and outside the workplace. It makes the workplace a more productive, attractive and corporately responsible place to work. Positive well-being can also benefit the local community and, more broadly, the country as a whole because of well people requiring less support from the health services.'

3.   Setting the agenda

The foreword highlights the Government Foresight report on mental capital and well-being which stated the costs of over £100 billion to UK plc in terms of sickness absence, presenteeism and regrettable labour turnover and that nearly 40% of all incapacity benefit at work is due to common mental disorders of depression, anxiety and stress. It notes that higher rates of productivity are most important because the UK currently sits at the bottom of the G7 and near the bottom of the G20 countries in terms of productivity per capita. As such, the way

people are managed and whether a culture that enhances employees' well-being is created are now bottom line issues.

The authors state that they want to set an aspirational agenda for the future direction of workplace health and well-being which should be at the centre of how an organisation fulfils its mission and carries out its operations and so is not a one-off initiative. It states that there are benefits for employers from an integrated approach to health and well-being as it can nurture heightened levels of employee engagement, and foster a workforce where people are committed to achieving organisational success.

The report notes that 'there exists a spectrum of employer practice, ranging from those organisations for which employee well-being doesn't make it onto their agenda to those that offer well-being initiatives but may not support them in an integrated way through aligned leadership, people management and organisation culture. And then there's the minority of employers that are leading the way by seeing the well-being of their workforce as the foundation for their business, taking well-being considerations into account across every facet of their business.'

The report concludes that 'despite significant advances in thinking and some evidence of forward-thinking practice, there remains an implementation gap.'

4.   The 5 domains of well-being

The report outlines the CIPD's 5 domains of well-being namely health, work, values/principles, collective/social and personal growth. These are not stand alone elements but there is a large degree of overlap and interdependence between them. The report goes on to say that the effectiveness of every domain element and initiative depends on the interaction between the organisation and the individual. It may be the responsibility of the employer to develop and implement a good health promotion programme, but its success will depend on the employer's effective communication of the offering and the participation of employees.

Table 1:   Illustrations of the five domains of well-being

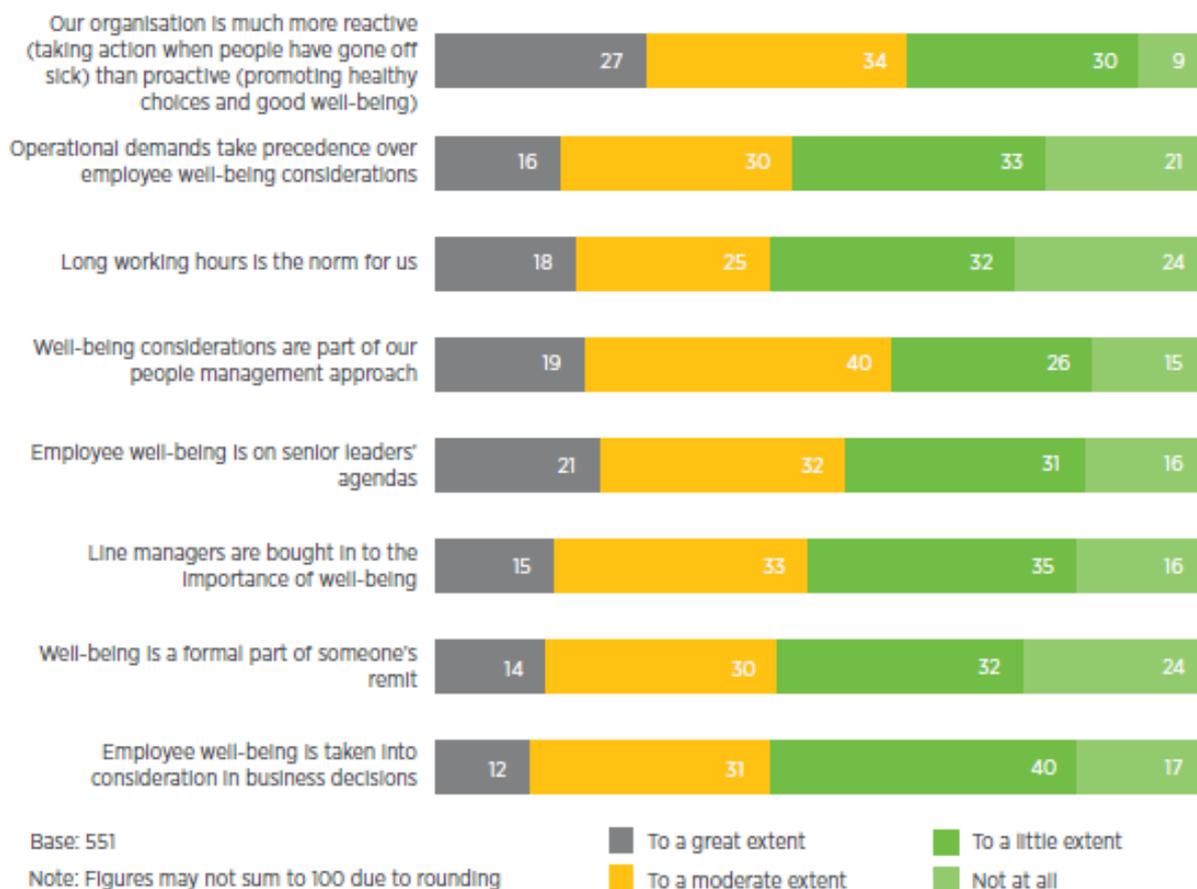| Domain	Elements	Examples of well-being initiatives/activities
HEALTH	Physical health	Health promotion, good rehabilitation practices, health checks, well-being benefits, health insurance protection, managing disability, occupational health support, employee assistance programme
	Physical safety	Safe working practices, safe equipment, personal safety training
	Mental health	Stress management, risk assessments, conflict resolution training, training line managers to have difficult conversations, managing mental ill-health, occupational health support, employee assistance programme
WORK	Working environment	Ergonomically designed working areas, open and inclusive culture
	Good line management	Effective people management policies, training for line managers, sickness absence management
	Work demands	Job design, job roles, job quality, workload, working hours, job satisfaction, work–life balance
	Autonomy	Control, innovation, whistleblowing
	Change management	Communication, involvement, leadership
	Pay and reward	Fair and transparent remuneration practices, non-financial recognition

VALUES/PRINCIPLES	Leadership	Values-based leadership, clear mission and objectives, health and well-being strategy, corporate governance, building trust
	Ethical standards	Dignity at work, corporate social responsibility, community investment, volunteering
	Diversity	Diversity and inclusion, valuing difference, cultural engagement, training for employees and managers
COLLECTIVE/SOCIAL	Employee voice	Communication, consultation, genuine dialogue, involvement in decision-making
	Positive relationships	Management style, teamworking, healthy relationships with peers and managers, dignity and respect
PERSONAL GROWTH	Career development	Mentoring, coaching, performance management, performance development plans, skills utilisation, succession planning
	Emotional	Positive relationships, personal resilience training, financial well-being
	Lifelong learning	Performance development plans, access to training, mid-career review, technical and vocational learning, challenging work
	Creativity	Open and collaborative culture, innovation workshops

The report notes that there is no-one size fits all approach to designing and effective employee well-being strategy but that each should be based on the unique needs and characteristics of its workforce.

5.   Survey results

The CIPD carried out a survey in 2015 of a range of organisations.

Figure 5: Organisations' approach to employee well-being (% of respondents)

	To a great extent	To a moderate extent	To a little extent	Not at all
Our organisation is much more reactive (taking action when people have gone off sick) than proactive (promoting healthy choices and good well-being)	27	34	30	9
Operational demands take precedence over employee well-being considerations	16	30	33	21
Long working hours is the norm for us	18	25	32	24
Well-being considerations are part of our people management approach	19	40	26	15
Employee well-being is on senior leaders' agendas	21	32	31	16
Line managers are bought in to the importance of well-being	15	33	35	16
Well-being is a formal part of someone's remit	14	30	32	24
Employee well-being is taken into consideration in business decisions	12	31	40	17

Base: 551

Note: Figures may not sum to 100 due to rounding

The first question asked is interesting as it reflects the extent to which organisations are reactive in their approach to well-being. 27% agree with this statement to a great extent and a further 34% agreed to a moderate extent. Responses to this question provide an overall reflection of the general nature of the organisation in the way it manages well-being.

6. The roles

The report outlines some suggestions about the role of different actors and how they can contribute to creating and implementing an effective well-being strategy. As a CIPD report it highlights the role of HR professionals and there is no doubt that HR has a pivotal role. They can take forward this role by ensuring that senior managers regard well-being as a priority, and that employee well-being practices are integrated in the organisation's day-to-day operations. It is HR professionals who will have the strategic vision to embrace health and well-being as a holistic practice that should be aligned to corporate goals, because it is they who will appreciate the significant benefits that can be realised from such an approach.

The report goes on to outline the role that senior managers, line managers, occupational health and employees have and the impact that the lack of commitment could potentially have too.

7. Local authority examples

The 5 domains of well-being noted above detail a number of examples of well-being initiatives and activities which reflect good practice. Many local authorities have exactly these kind of initiatives in place. For example, under the health domain local authorities are excellent at putting, safe working practices, risk assessments, equipment testing and personal safety training in place. Under the work domain they promote fair and transparent remuneration practices and good communications.

The report also lists employee well-being benefits provided by employers (which emerged from the CIPD 2015 Absence Management survey) and it includes a number of benefits which many local authorities benefit as a matter of course such as advice on healthy eating, health screening, stop smoking support and subsidised gym membership.

There are of course many other employee benefits which different local authorities provide for their employees and this is an area where more options are constantly appearing.

8. APSE Comment

Despite the actions of some local authorities in addressing the well-being agenda it is vital that all local authorities ensure it retains a high profile. Austerity can be a blocker to good practice in this area as it can be used as an excuse by some as a reason not to invest. In reality, investing effectively in well-being provides long term benefits through productivity, individual health and reputation. The arrangements in place may not be as formal as having a specific well-being strategy and action plan in place. It may consist of a range of existing yet separate initiatives which could be brought together to produce such as approach. In other words the parts may be in place but without a framework.

The report notes an 'implementation gap' with fewer than one in ten (8 per cent) of UK organisations currently having a standalone well-being strategy supporting the wider organisational strategy, adding that 38% of employees are under excessive pressure at work at least once a week and 43 per cent say that long hours working, to a greater or less extent, is the norm for their organisation. Falling into this type of category is clearly to be avoided.

There will always be times when employees are needed to work longer hours or work under pressure and there have been recent examples of this in many areas as a result of severe weather and flooding. Such instances are times when local authority employees are, in the main, only too willing to work for the benefit of the local community and support local people. However, they are supported, recompensed appropriately and as much planning for such unpredictable events as can be done, is done. These are examples of times when employees work well with the organisation and everyone benefits.

However, APSE does have anecdotal information showing that a proportion of local government employees note long working hours as a specific problem in the sector. It seems this is not promoted in any way by the

organisation but many managers simply feel it is necessary if they are to keep on top of their workload. This is an issue raised in the survey above and when faced with the statement 'Long working hours is the norm for us', 18% agreed to a great extent and 25% agreed to a moderate extent. There are significant factors which might justify local government employees agreeing with this statement including squeezed budgets leading to staff taking redundancy packages without being replaced and the fact that responsibilities are not being reduced even though the size of the workforce is.

It is certainly the case that a large proportion of local authority managers have come up through the organisation over a number of years often as a craft employee (joiner, plumber, horticulturist) or via a professional pathway (architect, lawyer, engineer) rather than being drafted into a management role from another sector. As such it is incumbent upon the local authority to ensure that managers are able to manage the non-technical elements of the job. Issues such as absence, conduct, mental health problems, personal medical problems and poor working relationships are common areas of concern but topics that have not been covered in the manager's previous training. Clearly, embedding and sustaining an effective well-being approach into an organisation requires an ongoing commitment to training for all parties.

This document is a useful prompt for local authorities to revisit their well-being strategies and practical arrangements. It contains a number of good ideas and a case study of good practice. Most local authorities and the HR departments within them will be aware of the content in this paper but as a developing topic it is worth remaining up to date with current thinking.

APSE welcomes this agenda as an approach to improving the physical and mental health of all employees. Engagement with frontline staff is something that APSE has long championed and this is another area where such engagement can have benefits for the organisation as their ideas, concerns and potential solutions will inform the process.

It is desirable that an underlying well-being philosophy is built in to the public sector rather than acting in a reactive manner. For most of the large organisations working in the sector this is certainly the case. Well-being, health and safety, employee satisfaction, physical and mental health are in the main issues which most local authorities take very seriously.

It is worth reiterating the definition provided in the report - 'Well-being is more than an avoidance of becoming physically sick. It represents a broader bio-psycho-social construct that includes physical, mental and social health.' Local authorities need to continue to address this topic, remain aware of good practice across the sector and ensure they invest where necessary to gain the long term benefits which accrue.

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