

## **Time to Change Employer Pledge**

As part of our commitment to supporting mental health in the workplace we will be signing up to the national initiative of Time to Change Employer Pledge.

### Background

We started this journey some 18 months ago when we committed to being part of the Suffolk Wellbeing Charter group, working across and with our partners in Suffolk to deliver excellence standards relating to a comprehensive framework specifically designed at the wellbeing of our staff.

One of those standards is specifically Mental Health & Wellbeing and this is also supported by our recent Mental Health at Work policy and our own Wellbeing Strategy.

We have worked closely with Suffolk and Norfolk Mind to deliver training to our Leadership team, managers and staff, raising awareness of mental health issues supported by ongoing related training which is now part of our corporate training programme.

It is well evidenced that mental health can affect anyone, it is the leading cause of sickness absence costing UK employers some £2.4 billion per year. Mind suggest that 1 in 4 people will have a mental health issue this year – with many too worried to share it for fear of discrimination .

We can have a real impact on the people around us if we are all aware of our attitude towards mental health. Mental health is everyone's business and responsibility – whether that is in terms of maintaining our own mental health but also being respectful and supportive of poor mental health of others.

Mental health is high on the government agenda, and yet still there is insufficient resource to fully support it. There is still stigma attached to mental health problems and this means that people do not feel comfortable talking about those problems, sharing them, and often hide them, masking the issues. It is healthy to talk about feelings, to let others know how you are feeling and to feel safe to do so.

Looking after the mental health of our staff is everyone's responsibility. It is not just written in a policy or documented in a report. It is not fixed by arranging activities which embrace mental health but it is about a continuum of support, advice, activity, understanding, management. We will not "crack" mental health but we can make a difference in supporting our people.

## The Pledge

Time to Change is led by two organisations – Mind and Rethink Mental Illness. They have encouraged organisations to sign a pledge of commitment towards supporting mental health in the workplace and to complete an Employer Pledge action plan. This focuses on now and the future, ensuring there is senior leadership buy in and that commitment is given to raising awareness of mental health, working towards an environment when staff feel able to seek support and openly discuss issues.

Our action plan has been approved by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness on the basis that much of the ground work has been done and successfully achieved. There was very little amendment as the feedback was that there was already a strong level of commitment shown so far but for us the work starts now.

Our pledge, which will be published on the Time to Change wall, is “we are committed to protecting our employees’ health and safety and welfare. We will continue to support staff with regards to mental health issues, by increasing awareness of mental health issues through our councils, initiating actions to prevent and manage issues of mental health and by supporting our managers to help support their staff to stay well and in work.”

The pledge was signed by Cllr Terry Clements, Mayor and Cllr Steve Edwards as portfolio holder for Resources & Performance, along with colleagues on Wednesday 13 September at 11.00 a.m. at West Suffolk House and marked our commitment.

As part of the pledge, and in the coming months, we will be looking for some of our staff to become “champions” in the organisation, who may or may not have experienced mental health issues but who will be committed to joining the campaign to support our commitment and help break down stigma and discrimination in the workplace.