

## Submission for

## 'The Good Practice and Innovation Award for Member Support and Development'

### Purpose of Submission

This submission seeks to highlight the excellent and innovative practices that Rhondda Cynon Taf's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit have undertaken with regard to Elected Member support and seeks to demonstrate that the services and support have **demonstrably improved** the outcomes for our Elected Members and Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCTCBC). It will be established that this ongoing practice is **over and above** that required for the advanced level of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

### Introduction

There has, in recent years, been a rapid decline in industry and as a consequence, higher levels of deprivation within the county borough; the result of which has seen intricate health needs developing in many areas. 'Early diagnosis and early targeted intervention' has always been the cornerstone of the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit's practices, which in turn means that there need to be processes in place that will allow us to do what we need to do; namely maximising attendance in our workforce.

The Unit is primarily a support service and is about helping to ensure that people are fit to undertake the work that is asked of them and to protect and promote the health of our employees, which includes that of our Elected Members.

As the largest employer in the area, schemes aimed at improving health and wellbeing of our employees and Elected Members are crucial. As representatives of the communities of RCTCBC, it is vital that our Elected Members work to achieve the Council's vision; that is that,

*"Rhondda Cynon Taf will be a community where everyone who lives, works in or visits the area will enjoy the benefits of a better quality of life, achieving their potential, while helping to develop and protect the area for the benefit of others".*

A single integrated plan has also been developed to deliver this Vision, which has three key principal objectives, that people in RCT will be *safe, healthy and prosperous*. As the largest employer in the area, schemes aimed at improving

health and wellbeing of our staff and Elected Members will in turn have an impact on the health and wellbeing of our communities. One of the key priorities within the Single Integrated Plan is '**Health**', namely that people have a sense of emotional wellbeing and are more resilient to mental illness; that fewer people smoke; that fewer people are overweight or obese; that people make informed choices about their sexual health; that children and families receive early intervention and support to meet their needs and that adults are able to live independent and fulfilled lives.

It is with these key priorities in mind that the ongoing work with our employees and Elected Members is so important. As discussed within the introduction to this submission, it is the resulting impact on individual Elected Members that has been the most significant as a result of the above interventions. The evidence from this is quantitative, qualitative and anecdotal.

## Background

It has always been the case that our Elected Members have been able to access the same services and support as our employees across the board, however with a view to further facilitating better engagement from our Elected Members in accessing these services and support, we reinforced this with Members as a part of their Induction programme following the last elections in 2012, where we surveyed all currently serving Members to ascertain what they wanted to see from the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit and whether there were any specific interventions that they would like to see included in the services available to them. Therefore, consultation with our Elected Members was vital to not only ensure a focused programme of interventions, but to also ensure that their health and wellbeing is managed as effectively as possible.

Since this time, we have consulted with them on a regular basis via a range of methods for example through the provision of presentations followed by Q&A and surveys to ensure that the services that we provide, better meet their needs in their roles. Whilst this advice and support to our Members has been innovative and pioneering in its approach, it is the resulting impact that has been most dramatic.

Due to the confidential nature of the work undertaken by the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit, it is not always possible to collate quantifiable evidence for all of the interventions that have taken place; especially where the interventions are bespoke, therefore making the Elected Members in question identifiable. Notwithstanding this, where figures are available, we have sought to include them within this submission. We feel that the qualitative information contained within this submission speaks much louder.

## What interventions have taken place

Mental health and musculoskeletal problems are the most significant contributors to sickness absence across all staff in the Council and there has been particular emphasis on tackling this problem through a range of initiatives and programmes.

As a means of ensuring that the above issues with respect to Mental Health and Musculoskeletal problems are tackled and that all support initiatives can be specifically targeted towards Elected Members, as an Authority we needed to bring to their attention any trends or concerns that relate to the health, safety, and wellbeing of everyone.

This in turn allowed us to promote a positive health and wellbeing culture and ensured that everyone was given the opportunity to influence policies, procedures, interventions and priorities.

The results from the Member Induction Survey in 2012 informed and allowed us to fully articulate a proposed Elected Member Programme. As an overview, this broadly included the following:

- MOT – Blood pressure, blood sugar / cholesterol testing, waist/hip ratio

*Eight Elected Members have undertaken the MOT tests.*

- MSD Assessments

*Two Elected Members have undertaken MSD Assessments.*

- Mental Health Awareness
- Health Promotions
- Physiotherapy Appointments

*Since 2014, twenty-Eight Elected Members have had physiotherapy appointments. Between 2010 and 2014, there were fifty Elected Members that sought to take advantage of this.*

- As part of the Elected Members' Open day and Induction in June 2012, the Occupational Health & Wellbeing Unit provided mini **clinics** for Members to attend that included Blood Pressure checks, height to weight ratio checks, blood sugar and cholesterol testing, all conducted by the Unit's nurses. Members' participation meant that not only did the Unit's employees raise their profile, but also highlighted the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle in relation to the tests offered.

*Overall, fifty-two Elected Members attended the mini clinics as part of their induction process.*

- **Health Surveillance** is about having systematic, timely and appropriate procedures in place to detect early signs and signals of work-related ill health in employees and Elected Members and to then act on those results. The main aims are to safeguard the health of employees including:
  - Identifying and protecting those employees at increased risk
  - Early identification of symptoms to provide early support
  - To check the long-term effectiveness of control measures

The following tests are also carried out to spot early signs of ill health:

- Audiology (Hearing Test)
- Spirometry (Lung Function Test)
- HAV's (Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome / White Finger)
- Dermal Measurement (Skin Hydration)

*Whilst no Elected Members have needed this as part of their role, having an awareness of the type of intervention that staff are able to access at a strategic level is crucial and all Members will have a knowledge of these procedures through the communication exercises that the Unit implement, such as:*

- **Presentations** – A number of presentations have taken place within Elected Member Induction and within our Elected Member Development Conferences that are held quarterly. These are primarily an opportunity for Members to gain knowledge and skill in a number of areas that are relevant to their roles and indeed to impart any pertinent information. These presentations that the Unit have given as a part of these conferences have sought to make Members aware of the services that are available to them, highlight areas of priority for the Unit and for them to seek further understanding of initiatives through question and answer sessions.

*Nineteen Elected Members have attended these sessions.*

- **Workwell** – A quarterly health promotion magazine, which features helpful advice and guidance on both national health campaigns and local issues. The content is informed by issues that are pertinent to employees and Elected Members based on information from our Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit and through Health Surveillance.

*To date, sixteen issues of Workwell have been sent to all of our Elected Members.*

- Within the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit, a brand new and bespoke **Rehabilitation Suite** has been commissioned, the purpose of which is to build the physical strength of individuals using programmes designed to suit specific needs following on from injury or illness.

*Whilst there are no specific figures for the use of this by Elected Members, the twenty-eight Members who have sought physiotherapy, will have had access to this fantastic facility.*

- **Mind Body Balance** – This innovative and effective Physiotherapy-led programme comprised sessions over 6-week periods. Employees and Elected Members benefitted from undertaking an evidence-based programme of gentle group exercise and acupuncture which has been proven to reduce stress, anxiety and depression levels whilst simultaneously improving their physical wellbeing.

*This is open to all of our Elected Members through the physiotherapy sessions that are available to them*

- **Know Your Numbers** is 'Blood Pressure UK's' flagship awareness campaign. It encourages adults across the UK to know and understand their blood pressure numbers and take the necessary action to reach and maintain a healthy blood pressure. The national campaign takes place on the second week of September every year and over the last couple of years we have completed thousands of blood pressure checks for RCT employees and Elected Members.

*This has been a popular initiative with our Elected Members with many taking advantage of this service as and when the Unit's nurses were based in Clydach Vale.*

- **Steroid Injection Therapy** - Injection therapy is the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) by the localised injection of a drug. The provision of an injection therapy service provides a safe, evidence based, and time-effective treatment for the management of numerous commonly presenting MSD's.

*This intervention only began in March 2014 – to date, one Elected Member has taken advantage of this service*

- **Workout at Work Day** was organised by the Occupational Health Team in conjunction with Leisure Services. It gave employees and Elected Members a great opportunity to see how the role of exercise can improve wellbeing. It highlighted the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and regular physical activity. Events took place in Council buildings across Rhondda Cynon Taff and included activities such as Zumba, Cycling and Pilates classes.

*In addition to staff taking part in this, a small number of Elected Members took part in these activities.*

- **Corporate MoreCard** – The MoreCard is the Council's card for leisure which will allow employees and Elected Members unlimited access to a huge range of our leisure and sports facilities. Access to these services were highlighted to Elected Members during Induction in 2012.

*Three Members now hold Corporate More Max Cards*

*One Member now holds a full adult More Max card*

*Three Members now hold a 60+ More Max card*

*One Member now has a More Max Level 3*

*One Member now holds an annual membership*

*We have in excess of twenty-three Members who have Pay and Play memberships, which means that they use the facilities as they see fit and pay the full applicable price for the activity.*

- **Blood Donation** – In conjunction with the Welsh Blood Service, the mobile blood donation clinic has been stationed at various locations around the County, giving employees and Elected Members the opportunity to contribute blood and raise awareness of the issue of low blood supplies on a regional and national basis.

*Over the past few blood donation sessions, around thirty Elected Members have taken part and given blood.*

- **Smoking Cessation** – Employees and Elected Members have been opportunity to attend smoking cessation workshops, access to advice and guidance and 'Quit Kits' to help them on their journey to a smoke-free future.

*Whilst we do not have figures on the number of Elected Members that have stopped smoking through these workshops, anecdotally we are aware that there are a small number that have.*

- **Managing my Life** – This programme is a series of four workshops aimed at employees and Elected members who feel that they would benefit from additional support in different areas of their life. The workshops are designed to be informative, providing practical tools and techniques whilst allowing an opportunity to share and learn from others in areas including managing stress, positivity and confidence and improving resilience and self-esteem.

*Some of our Elected Members have participated in these workshops.*

- **Cycle to Work Scheme** – There is much evidence to suggest a link between physical exercise and wellbeing. We sought to offer employees and Elected Members the opportunity to obtain a cycle through the scheme, with the intention of improving health and wellbeing whilst at the same time reducing their carbon footprint.

*To date, two Elected Members have purchased bikes through the scheme*

- **Flu vaccinations** are offered to frontline service areas and in 2012, approximately three hundred and fifty staff received the vaccine. Vaccine clinics were held throughout RCT along with clinics at the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit.

*This scheme has since 2014 been opened up to include Elected Members.*

- **Women's Health Week** – A health promotion campaign that looked specifically at issues relevant to female employees and Elected Members. This included a range of activities including a netball tournament, articles in WorkWell and advice on the Menopause.
- **Tenovus Health Checks** – 'Tenovus' located their mobile cancer screening clinic at various locations throughout the Council offering confidential screening advice and guidance on a range of cancers including mole checking and a computer programme checking triggers.

## Findings

As seen, the interventions, services and ongoing support for our Elected Members has meant that many of them have gained knowledge and understanding of many areas relating to their health and the practices of our Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit in addition to the opportunity to engage in physical activity, which in itself is fantastic.

However, as a means of demonstrating the impact that this has had on individuals, here is what some elected Members have said about the support that they have received and the impact that it has had on them personally and professionally.

- **Physiotherapy, Acupuncture and Injection Therapy**

*"Having had problems with my knees for a number of years and having been to various doctors, had numerous x-rays without a satisfactory outcome, I became aware of the services that our Occupational Health Unit provided through the information that they had given us. The treatment that I had was a programme of physiotherapy and acupuncture over a period of a few weeks. The difference has been absolutely amazing and meant that I was able to carry on my duties as a Councillor. About 4 weeks ago, I began having steroid injections, which has had a significant difference to my knee!*

*The service that I have received has been first class and I am so grateful for the time and support that I have been given. Without this treatment and support, I would not have been able to cope with my workload."*

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*"Just a few words to say how much I appreciated my course of acupuncture to both my knees through Occupational Health. Following surgery I started experiencing pain in my knee, my GP arranged further investigations through the NHS. On recommendation I referred into the Occupational Health and I was treated by one of the Physiotherapists with acupuncture and I indeed felt a lot better after this and the pain drastically reduced. The Physiotherapist was a good ambassador for Occupational Health as he was very pleasant and very professional in his work which*



*is important to patients as they are more often than not afraid what is going to happen to them. I really appreciated the treatment I had and would have no hesitation to recommend him to my fellow councillors and council staff."*

- **Cycle to Work Scheme**

*"I bought a bike through the Council's Cycle to Work Scheme. It has been a huge benefit to me. Being in the role that I am, I do spend a lot of time sitting down whether at a desk or meeting constituents. Having a new bike has allowed me to get out and about so much more than I did, which has had a huge impact on the amount that I exercise and on my health overall. I use the bike all of the time and would even say that it is now even in my blood!"*

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*"I bought a bike in early 2014. It replaced an old bike that was beyond repair. As a councillor I use it to get around the 10,000 residents and the various communities in my ward. It give me exercise and I think creates a memorable and positive impression of the Council.*

- **Elected Member MOT clinic**

*"I attended the Elected Member MOT clinic and it was well worth a visit as I did NOT expect the findings, I was advised to attend my GP surgery for further investigations and found the service beneficial."*

## **Conclusion**

This submission has sought to highlight the practices that RCTCBC's Occupational Health and Wellbeing Unit have undertaken with regard to Elected Member support.

We have shown that the services and support have **demonstrably improved** the outcomes for our Elected Members and that of RCTCBC and its communities. Whilst this ongoing practice is **over and above** that required for the advanced level of the Charter, it is the improving health and wellbeing of our staff and Elected Members that is of most value and that we are most proud of. In addition to the ongoing information, consultation and targeted interventions that our Members have benefitted from it is submitted that this has in turn allowed us to work with increasing focus towards meeting the priorities under the Single Integrated plan as highlighted within the introduction to this submission and in turn RCTCBC's vision that the people will be *safe, healthy and prosperous*.