

**MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK COMMITMENT****REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER****For Approval****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Mental Health at Work Commitment supported by the Royal Foundation and attached at Appendix 1.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the Authority support and approve the signing of the MIND Mental Health at Work Commitment.

**3. INTRODUCTION**

- 3.1 In 2019, Mind's initial Blue Light Programme activity came to an end, after 4 years of testing, delivering, and learning from a range of effective interventions. These helped to increase mental health awareness, tackle stigma, and improve support pathways in the emergency services. It represented a time for the Blue Light community to unite, a time to act, a time to change.
- 3.2 Since then, our emergency services have found themselves at the epicentre of a global pandemic - an unprecedented situation that continues to place increased pressure on the mental health of our emergency responders. Some have developed new mental health problems, whilst many with existing mental health problems have seen their symptoms worsen. More still, we know that the wide-ranging effects of the pandemic will be long lasting.
- 3.3 MIND'S latest research has shown that now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for a systematic approach toward supporting mental health. It is the time to make a commitment to our colleagues, that their mental health will be prioritised.
- 3.4 Undoubtedly, a collaborative and inclusive effort is needed from emergency services, professional bodies, charities, and policy makers; together, we must continue the fight for Blue Light mental health. Building on the existing strong foundations, signing up to the [Mental Health at Work Commitment](#) acts as a springboard for a collective movement, one that reaffirms that dedication – for the long term.

## 4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The coronavirus pandemic has put the emergency services at the forefront of an unprecedented situation that continues to place increased pressure on the mental health of our staff.
- 4.2 Prioritising mental health has never been more critical than it is now. Mind's research<sup>1,2</sup> found that:
- 69% of emergency responder's mental health had deteriorated as a result of the pandemic.
  - 1 in 4 emergency service workers have contemplated taking their own lives due to stress and poor mental health.
  - the pandemic response had exacerbated existing divides between frontline staff and senior management.
- 4.3 Further to wanting staff to be well and healthy, there is also a clear business case:
- Mind's research shows almost 2 in 3 blue light personnel have considered resigning from their job or voluntary role due to stress or poor mental health.<sup>3</sup>
  - The cost of poor mental health per employee (regardless of whether they have a mental health problem) in the emergency services is approximately £1,772 per year.<sup>4</sup>
  - Improving management of mental health in the workplace can save more than 30 per cent of the costs related to sickness absence due to mental ill health, presenteeism and staff turnover.<sup>5</sup>
  - Free initiatives such as simply promoting the importance of having open, honest two-way conversations can have a big impact.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.4 FRS nationally signed up to the MIND Time to Pledge campaign some years ago and much good has been done. However, we still see suicide, anxiety and depression and significant mental health issues in emergency services and we need to take the next to work together to improve the wellbeing of all our colleagues.
- 4.5 Those steps include making a visible commitment to our staff to keep a focus on what we can do to prevent and support people to maintain wellbeing.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/media/7246/blue-light-behind-the-mask-report-en-2021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/one-in-four-emergency-services-workers-has-thought-about-ending-their-lives/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4524/20046\\_mind-blue-light-programme-legacy-report-v12\\_online.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4524/20046_mind-blue-light-programme-legacy-report-v12_online.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

## 5 **MENTAL HEALTH AT WORK COMMITMENT**

### 5.1 **What is the Mental Health at Work Commitment?**

- 5.2 It is a simple framework outlining best practice standards to benchmark against and guide organisations towards better supporting the mental health of their people. It's based on the 'Thriving at Work' standards, and a natural progression from Mind's now retired 'Time to Change' employer pledge<sup>7</sup>, which more than 100 Blue Light organisations, including Cleveland Fire Brigade, signed.
- 5.3 It involves making a public commitment and is a way to signify our values. For the Blue Light community, signing up to the Commitment provides a statement of intent, declaring visibly that mental health at work is a strategic priority.
- 5.4 The Mental Health at Work Commitment needs support from people at every level, including senior leadership. It includes six standards for how organisations can better support employees' mental health:

#### **Standard 1: Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity**

During the pandemic, only 35% of emergency responders said that their organisation had prioritised their mental health and wellbeing. However, those with prior involvement in the Blue Light programme of activity were more likely to be positive about their organisation's efforts to support mental health<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Standard 2: Ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes**

It is important to have effective systems and processes in place to support staff. It's crucial that healthy lifestyle behaviours, and critically assesses and mitigates against risks to mental health be promoted. To be sustainable, this approach should be embedded within policies and systems across the whole organisation.

#### **Standard 3: Promote an open culture around mental health**

There needed to be more visible intervention from senior leaders if wellbeing initiatives were to reach their full potential<sup>7</sup>. It can have a huge impact when senior leaders have open conversations about mental health, further dispelling cynicism from staff about the authenticity of your mental health and wellbeing programmes. So actively encourage these conversations and raise awareness of the support available.

#### **Standard 4: Increase organisational confidence and capability**

There needed to be more visible intervention from senior leaders if wellbeing initiatives were to reach their full potential<sup>1</sup>. Line Managers and Blue Light Champions play a key part in supporting your workforce's mental health, but they can feel ill equipped to do this, in turn negatively affecting their own mental health. Senior leaders should promote effective people management, detailing how their mental health strategy supports managers and Blue Light champions.

---

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4524/20046\\_mind-blue-light-programme-legacy-report-v12\\_online.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/4524/20046_mind-blue-light-programme-legacy-report-v12_online.pdf)

**Standard 5: Provide mental health tools and support**

Standing by people when they experience a mental health problem is not only about retaining talented staff, it also sends a message about your service's values. 9 in 10 emergency responders have experienced stress, low mood and poor mental health at some point while working for the emergency services<sup>8</sup>, so it's important we provide effective mental health support.

**Standard 6: Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting**

Developing a clear picture of the mental health will help to understand what's affecting our staff and how well we're supporting them. Not only that but demonstrating continuous improvement of our wellbeing programmes will further show our commitment to your staff and volunteers wellbeing and mental health.

**6 BENEFIT REALISATION**

- 6.1 Prioritising mental health is not just the right thing to do for our Service and workforce, there are cultural and financial benefits for our service too. The cost of poor mental health per employee (regardless of whether they have a mental health problem) in the emergency services is approximately £1,772 per year. While improving management of mental health in the workplace can save more than 30 per cent of the costs related to sickness, presenteeism and staff turnover.<sup>9</sup> Apt investment can lead to having a more engaged and motivated workforce, and help to recruit talent with wellbeing thought to be a strong predictor of career satisfaction.<sup>10</sup> Even simple, free to implement initiatives such as promoting the importance of having open, honest two way conversations can have an impact.
- 6.2 Many FRS are invested in implementing their own strategies and will be utilising existing frameworks.<sup>11</sup> and the Commitment's standards will align to Service's existing approach. With this assurance signing up to the Commitment and implementing the standards will complement and amplify Service's work, not replace it.
- 6.3 The Commitment is not an accreditation or an endorsement however in signing-up to the Commitment and working toward fulfilling the standards, FRS can be confident that their approach to mental health is aligned to best practice, as deemed by the UK government.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/one-in-four-emergency-services-workers-has-thought-about-ending-their-lives/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.policenow.org.uk/impact-and-insights/>

<sup>11</sup> Frameworks including: [Oscar Kilo's Blue Light Framework](#), the [NHS Health and Wellbeing Framework](#), [Healthy Working Lives](#) and [Stay Safe Stay Well](#).

## **7 BRINGING THE COMMITMENT TO LIFE**

- 7.1 The guide has been created for those with roles linked to mental health and wellbeing, learning and development and organisational culture. It has been designed to provide a simple framework for developing, enhancing and/or evidencing efforts toward better mental health at work.
- 7.2 Emergency services will be at different stages of their journey in supporting workplace mental health. Service size, working environment, location, financial and personnel resourcing all impact on each service's approach.
- 7.3 For services who are less advanced on that journey, using this guide will help them to take initial steps to making a long-term commitment to improved ways of working. Services who are further along, can use this guide and recommended resources to complement their approach and use the best practice standards to clearly demonstrate to colleagues how and why they are supporting their mental health and wellbeing.
- 7.4 The ask for Members is to now sign the Commitment and to enable the creation of an action plan which will energise and provide focus to the commitment.
- 7.5 The National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) have already signed up to the Pledge and are encouraging each FRS to sign up individually. The NFCC have also offered support in development of action plans.

## **8. OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- 8.1 MIND have collated a range of useful resources to accompany each standard, accessible via the new [BlueLight Together website](#). It is acknowledged that there is no 'one size fits all', and so it is hoped to grow the sharing of best practice resources across the Blue Light community via the new website
- 8.2 Access to the [Mind led webinar series](#), developed in collaboration with expert partners, will help bring the Commitment's standards to life.
- 8.3 For the latest research insights, it is recommend that Services access the following sites:
- [Kings College London \(2020\)](#)
  - [Mind \(2021\)](#)
  - [NHS England \(2020\)](#)
  - [NHS Wales \(2020\)](#)
  - [NHS Scotland \(2020\)](#)
  - [Police Federation \(2021\)](#)
  - [The National Wellbeing Police Service \(2021\)](#)
  - [Deloitte \(2020\)](#)

**IAN HAYTON**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

**KAREN WINTER**  
**ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**  
**STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES**