

# Voluntary Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing Report

## Introduction

The Voluntary Reporting Framework was developed by the Government in partnership with leading businesses and third sector organisations, to support employers to voluntarily report information on disability, mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Arising from the independent ‘Thriving at Work Review’, conducted by Paul Farmer and Lord Dennis Stevenson and published in October 2017, is the Voluntary Reporting Framework which is aimed at supporting organisations with more than 250 employees (but can also be used to support smaller employers) who are keen to drive greater transparency in their organisation or industry. The framework document sets out the type of data and information that organisations should publish which demonstrates their commitment to recruiting and supporting those in the workplace with a disability, and the mental health and overall wellbeing arrangements in place to support their staff.

This report provides an overview of the arrangements in place and the activity undertaken by Cleveland Fire Brigade in 2024, with regards to Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing in the workplace.

## Our Approach

We are committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of our people by creating a positive, safe and healthy work environment.

Through our inclusive approach to health and wellbeing, we continue to create a safe and healthy workplace for all, making Cleveland Fire Brigade ‘A Great Place To Work’.

We strive to undertake a proactive approach to our health and wellbeing arrangements and provide a range of support and targeted interventions such as support for those who have declared a disability to us.

Our Health and Wellbeing framework is built upon four core pillars which are:

### Promote

Cleveland Fire Brigade promote physical and mental health including healthy lifestyles across the workforce by organising events, improving knowledge and providing materials, toolkits and online support.

## **Prevent**

We undertake continued analysis and comparisons of physical and mental health performance; engage in forums to share good practice, learn from others; seek feedback from staff; and deliver actions through the work with our own 'Health and Wellbeing Board'.

We provide training, workshops, materials, toolkits and support to help people build and improve their own resilience.

## **Detect & Support**

We provide a role risk assessment tool and guidance on screening and monitoring. We provide occupational health, physiotherapy and counselling services along with a Brigade Health and Fitness Co-ordinator. We look to ensure information, advice and guidance is provided to help identify early wellbeing issues.

## **Treat & Recover**

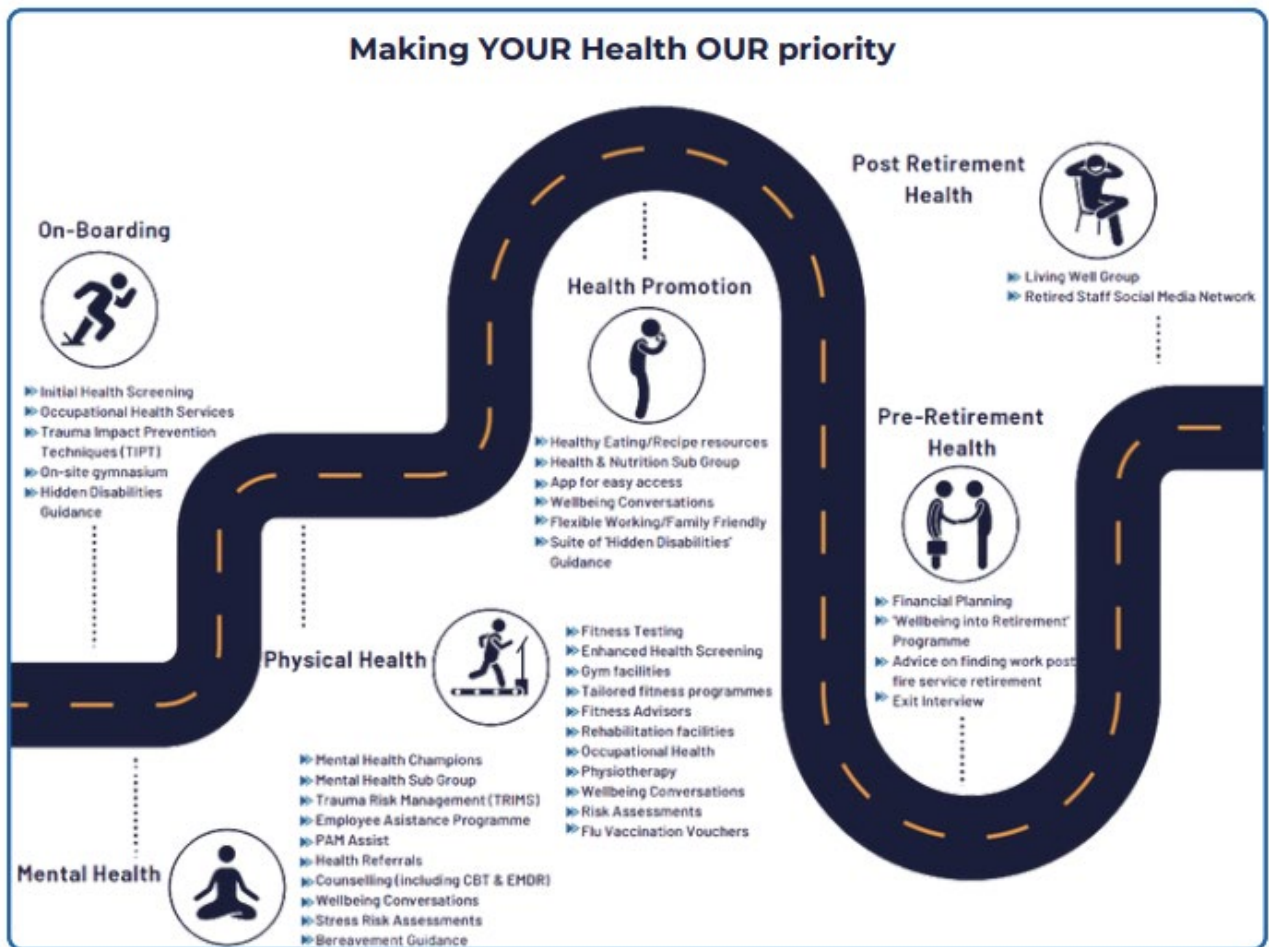
We operate in line with medical and occupational evidence for recruitment and retention of staff in the fire and rescue service and ensure our occupational health providers are members of the Association of Local Authority Medical advisors/accredited to the Safe, Effective, Quality Occupational Health Service Standards. We build organisational capability and individual resilience by providing and developing early intervention and post-trauma support.

# **Our Roadmap**

An employee's health and wellbeing journey starts from the moment they begin their career with us.

We have many support arrangements in place for every stage of someone's career, starting with 'on-boarding' and induction which is the time when they first arrive, continuing throughout their career with us, and helping to prepare them for retirement.

Our support for staffs mental and physical wellbeing does not stop at the point of retiring. Our 'Living Well' group provides an opportunity for them to maintain contact with the service and colleagues which can help to combat loneliness and isolation.



## Disability Data

The Brigade is recognised as a disability confident leader. In November 2020, we were awarded Level 3 'Disability Confident Leader' status by the Department of Works and Pensions.

Today, we continue to be accredited as a Disability Confident Leader following our successful re-submission last year, meaning that we are assured that our policies and procedures support disabled people in the workplace.

As a Disability Confident Leader, we have subjected our self-assessment of this standard to external challenge and validation. We are also taking an active leadership role in encouraging and helping other employers on their journey to becoming Disability Confident Employers.

We welcome and encourage job applications from those who have a disability, and this is evidenced within all recruitment materials. To date, our workforce profile compared with our community profile tells us that:

- CFB: 3.5% of staff have shared that they have a disability (which is an increase from the previous year)
- Teesside: 21.1% of the population across the Teesside area are recorded as being limited either a little, or a lot, by long-term health problems

We have numerous arrangements in place to support our staff who have, or during their employment with us develop, a disability. These include access to an extensive range of occupational health services including the provision of management advice and risk assessments relating to reasonable adjustments which can be offered to help people in the workplace. By continuing to demonstrate our commitment to supporting current and future staff with regards to disabilities, we hope that our workforce data will increase to better reflect that of our local community.

## Achievements

An overview of our work in 2024 with regards to disability.

Over the last year we have continued to work to ensure that our workplace attracts applications from those people who have a declared disability, and to continue to support our staff who have declared their disability to us.

Here are just some examples of what we have achieved in 2024:

- Continued to develop and update guidance documents which support staff and line managers to better understand the different types of conditions and how to access the most appropriate resources
- Maintained Level A (96.7%) Accessibility Compliant against the 'Web Content Accessibility Guidelines', which is a standard to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities
- Carried out risk assessments to identify reasonable adjustments for staff in their workplace, such as provision of screens for PC monitors to support staff with Dyslexia
- Introduced in ear hearing aids for operational staff with hearing impairments
- Continued to support the Brigade's 'Disability Staff Network'
- Promoted and supported a number of national campaigns such as 'Disability PRIDE' along with supporting and attending local Pride events

## Mental Health

The Brigade is committed to supporting staff mental wellbeing.

We follow the below simple framework organised into 5 areas that we use to support the mental health of staff:

Prioritise mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic programme of activity

- Proactively ensure work design and organisational culture drive positive mental health outcomes
- Promote an open culture around mental health
- Increase organisational confidence and capability
- Provide mental health tools and support
- Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting

We continue to carry out a self-assessment aligned to the actions to drive continuous improvement within the Brigade to support the mental wellbeing of our staff.

## Achievements

Over the last year we have continued to work to ensure that we promote and support the mental health of our staff.

Here are just some examples of what we have achieved in 2024:

- 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 we hosted a health, fitness and wellbeing conference
- Promoted Mental Health Awareness Month (May) and Mental Health Awareness Day (October)
- Continued to deliver Trauma Risk Management (TRIMS) support to our staff involved in dealing with emergency incidents
- Continued to provide specialist support and counselling through our Occupational Health arrangements
- Continue to promote a dedicated crisis support line ran by the Firefighters Charity ('Suicide Crisis Line')
- Time to Talk campaign, an opportunity for colleagues to have conversations about mental health and listen to each other openly.
- Cadence Approach and Cadence Wellbeing Scorecard

## Wellbeing

Employee health and wellbeing is a strategic priority, and we have a number of things in place to support staff.

For many years we have acknowledged what is widely known - that being in work is good for people's health and wellbeing; and that a healthy workforce is beneficial to employers too. By creating a positive, safe and healthy work environment for staff we can increase morale, improve work-life balance and, in turn, positively impact the performance of our service.

We are passionate about the health and wellbeing of our people and have, for a long time, committed resources aimed at helping to prevent people being absent from the workplace due to health reasons. Our strategies have focussed on robust sickness absence management and improved support for people's physical health and mental health, which unfortunately is becoming one of the top causes for ill health across the fire and rescue services sector and others.

Our understanding of the wellbeing needs of our workforce emanates from a range of data and intelligence sources. These include the analysis and benchmarking of employee health and wellbeing information, engagement and insight from staff, information from our Occupational Health provider and learning from others.

We have a well-established 'Health and Wellbeing Board', chaired by a member of the Brigade's Executive Leadership Team, which meets on a quarterly basis and delivers on actions focusing on physical health, mental health and health promotion. We have a dedicated Health and Fitness Co-ordinator and have also trained a number of our staff at each location across the Brigade as Health and Fitness Advisors, all with the aim of providing targeted health and wellbeing activities, interventions and support.

As part of our assurance model, we have subjected our health and wellbeing arrangements to external assessment which includes the 'North East Better Health at Work Award'. This award recognises the efforts of employers in the North East and Cumbria in addressing health issues within the workplace.

For the last 5 years we have continued to maintain our 'Ambassador' status and in 2024 we achieved the 'Maintaining Excellence' status.

A selection of our work with regards to Health and Wellbeing

Over the last year we have continued to work to ensure that we promote and support the health and wellbeing of our staff.

Here are just some examples of what we have achieved in 2024:

- 18th April 2024 we hosted a health, fitness and wellbeing conference which included topics such as dealing with addiction, nutrition and the real world, and the health of women in the fire service
- Achieved 'Maintaining Excellence' status, awarded by North East Better Health at Work Awards
- Promoted a number of health and wellbeing campaigns such as 'Dry January', World Sleep Day and World Menopause Day.
- Implemented improvements to Firefighter fitness testing to better aid decision making in relation to the safe undertaking of emergency response activities
- Entered teams into the 'British Firefighter Challenge' (Male, Female and Mixed categories)
- Promoted 'Cycle to Work Scheme'

- Continued to develop a bespoke portal on the Brigade's intranet site, to host a range of resources and support information for staff
- Improved nutritional information available to staff e.g. 'My Recipes' along with a section in the Health, Fitness and Wellbeing conference on nutrition and the real world
- Commenced procurement of new Occupational Health services
- Participated in research with Lancaster University on trialling an online 'Menopause Toolkit'

This report, in addition to other reports referenced, are published on the Brigade's external website at: <http://www.clevelandfire.gov.uk>

Copies of this report are available to all departments, fire stations, partner agencies, local equality organisations and any interested parties on request.

The report will be made available in other languages, large print, Braille, audio, etc. on request. Please contact our Communications Team using the details below, if you require information about this report in an alternative format.

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