

Wellbeing Board

Date	22 January 2021
Report title	Thrive at Work
Portfolio Lead	Cllr Izzi Seccombe – Wellbeing
Accountable Chief Executive	Deborah Cadman OBE, West Midlands Combined Authority email: Deborah.cadman@wmca.org.uk Tel: (0121) 214 7800
Accountable Employee	Sean Russell Head of Thrive Sean.russell@wmca.org.uk
Report has been considered by	N/A

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

1. To consider the report
2. Approve the approach going forward
3. Support the considerations outlined to amplify the recruitment of organisations.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report is to provide a high-level overview of the Thrive at Work programme and to seek support to amplify the programme to businesses across the West Midlands.

2. Background

- 2.1. In January 2017, WMCA launched the Mental Health Commission chaired by Rt. Hon Sir Norman Lamb. One of the key programme areas in the action plan was the development of Thrive at Work.
- 2.2. Thrive at Work is an evidence-based accreditation programme developed to provide the tools for businesses and employers across the East and West Midlands to enable them to improve the productivity of their workforce and support an improvement in wellbeing.
- 2.3. In 2019, the WMCA, with partners, developed a **Randomised Control Trial (“RCT”)** to test whether a fiscal incentive would improve the uptake of wellbeing programmes in **Small and Medium enterprises (“SMEs”)**. Funding was obtained

from the innovation fund of the Work and Health Unit, to design and deliver the programme.

- 2.4. The RCT was split into 4 arms; Full Grant, Half Grant, Toolkit with support from the Thrive at Work Team, and assignment onto the trial with no intervention offered, the latter of which acted as a control.
- 2.5. As part of the trial the team developed the **Thrive at Work Toolkit**. This product provides an accredited process for businesses to follow to gain accreditation to Bronze, Silver or Gold. The Toolkit comprises a set of tools to enable businesses to begin the wellbeing journey and provides an evidence-based approach to intervention. The programme starts with a self-assessment and health needs assessment including a staff survey. The information obtained from these assessments then drives an action plan for delivery within the organisation. The Toolkit focuses on **4 structured mental health and wellbeing thematic areas**; enablers of physical health, Musculoskeletal (“MSK”), Mental Health, and healthy lifestyles, providing support and guidance to employers.
- 2.6. The trial **recruited 152 SMEs across the WMCA** footprint to create an evidence-based approach. The final report is due to be published in spring this year. The early evidence suggested that a grant supported businesses to deliver wellbeing activities that may not have been previously deliverable. However, the evidence also suggested that not all wellbeing activities required funding and a structured approach to intervention could enable an organisation to make a difference through delivering free activities such as a lunchtime running session, mindfulness sessions, yoga and Zumba put on by staff members. The overarching evidence suggested that organisations that had senior engagement to embed the approach were more likely to develop better outcomes.
- 2.7. Building on the early work, Thrive at Work continued to grow **recruiting up to 400 businesses reaching up to 135,000 employees across the region**. In April 2019, WMCA in partnership with Coventry and Warwick Universities, and in association with the mental Health Charity Mind, bid for £6.7M worth of funding from the Midlands Engine to amplify the programme through the Midlands Engine Mental Health and Productivity Pilot.
- 2.8. The programme **seeks to enable businesses across the East and West Midlands** access to the Thrive at Work programme and the Mind Wellbeing at Work programme. In addition, a number of academic trials are being implemented through partners at Birmingham, Derby, Lincoln and Nottingham Universities to create interventions to support employees whose productivity may be impacted by poor mental health. examples of the interventions include providing wearable trackers to monitor sleep and supporting with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or providing a toolkit to employers for in-work retention of evidence-based approaches to assist people in returning to work.

- 2.9. A key element of the trial is the **amplification of mental health literacy programmes** such as Every Mind Matters, the free NHS toolkit which provides an individual Mental Wellbeing action plan; Mental Health First Aid with an ambition to bring this in line with the employers statutory responsibility to provide physical first aid in the workplace, and finally, 'This is Me' the workplace mental health anti-stigma campaign where staff in the organisation tell their own story of living with mental health to raise its profile and break down barriers.
- 2.10. However, the **COVID-19 pandemic has created a real challenge** for the programme. Businesses are struggling to survive financially and although employees are important, the emphasis on the workforce is not translating into programme sign ups.
- 2.11. Providing the narrative for employers is clear - It is recognised that more employees than ever will require support:
- It is estimated 8.5 million adults (20% of all adults) in England will need support for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorders and other mental health difficulties following the pandemic. 37% of these will not have experienced mental ill health prior to the pandemic. (Centre for Mental Health, 2020),
 - Isolation is on the rise. 8% of adults in November reported feeling always or often lonely, representing 4.2 million adults (ONS, 2020),
 - 48% of employees are working long and irregular hours; 43% feel they do not have enough time to get work done; 36% feel under too much work pressure (Institute of Employment Studies, 2020),
 - 79% of HR Managers believe the widespread implementation of remote working has encouraged e-presenteeism (Mental Health Foundation & LinkedIn, 2020).
- 2.12. Learning from the latest research of all factors, organisational support for mental health and wellbeing has the **biggest impact on mental health outcomes for employees**:
- 77% of employees working in supportive organisations felt generally happy at work compared to 23% of those working in organisations who are not. (Mind, 2020),
 - 75% of employees with supportive managers felt generally happy at work compared to 28% with unsupportive managers. (Mind, 2020),
 - Only 56% of employees feel that their organisation supports their mental health (Mind, 2020).
- 2.13. Adapting to the pandemic, Thrive at Work responded in the early stage of the first lockdown to create **Thrive at Home**. This toolkit provides advice and guidance to employers and employees on how to stay mentally well whilst working from home. The approach is equally valuable as we move to a more agile work agenda post COVID-19.
- 2.14. Responding to the feedback from businesses that the Bronze accreditation was challenging to complete due the volume of work required, a light version called the **"Foundation" level** has recently been launched. This product creates a five-step approach to enable an organisation to understand where they currently are on the

wellbeing journey and to develop an action plan to support the migration towards Bronze accreditation. It is anticipated that the programme for the foundation accreditation will take 90 days to complete.

- 2.15. Currently, the programme is **working with a total of 369 organisations**. Of these, 22 organisations have achieved Bronze accreditation including WMCA and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Dudley Citizens Advice Bureaux as well as a number of SMEs and schools. The team have just accredited the first foundation level organisation. There are currently four organisations progressing towards Silver accreditation.
- 2.16. However, despite the changes to the programme, recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. The Thrive at Work programme is seeking to recruit a total of 842 business within the next 18 months across the East and West Midlands to amplify the offer and drive improvements in productivity. The ambition will be to support 50% of the businesses to the Foundation level, 20% of businesses to Bronze, 5% to Silver and pushing for 1% to be working towards Gold.
- 3.2. There are 3 potential opportunities to consider which will support the drive to increase the number of businesses involved in the programme, and lever this as part of the recovery agenda moving forward.
 - 3.2.1. **Commonwealth Games** – this provides an excellent opportunity to promote Thrive at Work to all business and employers working with the Commonwealth Games.
 - 3.2.2. **Anchor institutions** – this creates an opportunity for major employers in the region to adopt the programme and lead by example. As highlighted, we have WMCA and Solihull MBC already at Bronze level with Coventry also about to be formally accredited to Bronze.
 - 3.2.3. **Procurement pipeline** – enabling a process in which organisations applying to work with the public or private sector demonstrate their social value through the commitment to workplace wellbeing. enabling a process to occur where organisations who are applying to work with the public or private sector demonstrate through the social value approach the commitment to workplace wellbeing.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. This programme is part of the broader Midlands Engine Mental Health and Productivity Pilot seeking to improve productivity and increase awareness of mental health in the workplace. It should be seen as a strong supporting programme for businesses and employers in the West Midlands and across the wider Midlands Engine and should be a vital tool to support employees during the pandemic and during the recovery phase.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. The overall financial envelope for the programme from 1st July 2019 to 30th June 2022 is £2,533,998, which included the £1.542m for the initial Randomised Control Trial leaving £991,966 to cover the expansion of the Midlands Engine work until June 2022. It is anticipated that this will be spent to a net zero position by June 2022.
- 5.2. Grant funded programmes (Midlands Engine funding) have ring fenced budgets and will operate in line with their terms and conditions, and work is ongoing to secure these programmes post their end dates.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. No issues at this stage.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1. It is recognised that there are growing inequalities, with the prevalence of poor mental health in the workplace costing the UK economy £42bn per year through absenteeism and presenteeism. There are currently over 70,000 people out of work in the region with poor physical and mental health conditions and the pandemic has shown that between 30-36% of employees are feeling anxious. It is also recognised that the healthy life expectancy across the region is growing and employees are likely to be working with long-term conditions for a significant number of years until they retire or leave the workplace through poor health. This refresh will seek to address these issues and focus on reducing the inequality gap.

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The overall inclusive growth implications associated with the Thrive At Work programme are positive, given that the aim is to ensure that economic activity is not created at the expense of citizen mental health. The Covid-19 pandemic has made mental health in the workplace a higher priority than ever, but as the report highlights, the capacity of local businesses and organisations to take on new practice is being seriously tested. Furthermore, employees are under more pressure than ever to be 'present', given the heightened risk of unemployment and reduced numbers of vacancies in certain

sectors. Ensuring that the programme retains its focus and drive is important, given the opportunities highlighted in the report to grow good practice across more businesses. However, continued collaboration with funders and participating businesses will enable the programme to be tailored to the needs of employers and employees, which may change in nature between now and the end of the programme in June 2022.

9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1. The framework is a whole system approach and any decision to test interventions or propose action will be considered within the Thrive programmes proposed strategy and provide regular update to the Wellbeing Board.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1. None

11. Schedule of Background Papers