

## Wellbeing Board

<b>Date</b>	08.03.22
<b>Report title</b>	Thrive at Work – update
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### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

It is recommended that the Wellbeing Board:

- a) Notes the current performance and emerging impact of the Thrive at Work programme;
- b) Notes the programme funding position;
- c) Identifies representatives from respective constituent organisations to contribute to the emerging business development work, which is being undertaken to refresh the Thrive at Work model to respond to current circumstances and to achieve financial sustainability.

## THRIVE AT WORK – UPDATE

### 1. Purpose

1.1 This paper provides an update on Thrive at Work in respect of:

- Programme context;
- Current performance and emerging impact;
- Programme funding;
- Emerging business development work.

### 2. Background and context for Thrive at Work

2.1 Thrive at work was developed and launched in 2018 to provide employers with both a holistic approach and a practical framework to develop workplaces that promote and support employee health and wellbeing. It initially started life as a research trial and encompasses a series of modules, which are highlighted in a later section.

2.2 Thrive at Work is free for organisations with 8+ employees, which are based in the Midlands. The programme is currently fully funded through a partnership programme called the Mental Health & Productivity Pilot (MHPP) programme. The overarching aim of MHPP is to provide resources which are effective at supporting workplace mental health and in turn to help to increase productivity amongst employees. Key MHPP partners are indicated below:



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



UNIVERSITY  
of DERBY



Loughborough  
University



The University of  
Nottingham

2.3 MHPP's 'tools' to support workplace wellbeing include Thrive at Work (arguably the key tool) plus the 'SLEEP', 'REST' and 'PROWORK' research programmes, 'Mentor', the 'Mental Health at Work' Commitment, 'Managing Minds' and 'This is Me'.

2.4 MHPP receives funding from central government via the Midlands Engine. This is due to cease at the end of June 2022, thereby also impacting on the funding of the Thrive at Work programme. It has been acknowledged that the delivery of Thrive and the rest of the MHPP programme has been significantly hampered by the pandemic - potentially delaying progress by approximately 15 to 18 months. As

such, a funding bid has been submitted to the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) to give the programme the opportunity for recover the lost ground. DHSC have been given funding options, each of which prioritise Thrive at Work, with a potential funding timeline until March 2024. (A funding decision is awaited at the time of writing this paper, but is anticipated to be known by the time the Wellbeing Board meeting takes place).


### 3. The Thrive at Work programme

3.1 Thrive at Work is a structured comprising 5 thematic assessment areas, with a number of criteria – see below. Evidence of achievement against the respective criteria lead to accreditation at 4 potential levels – Foundation, Bronze, Silver and Gold.





**Enablers of Health**

- Board Level Engagement
- Health and Wellbeing Lead(s)
- Attendance Management
- Policies and Procedures
- Line Manager Support
- Health and Safety
- Social Value



**Mental Health**

- Identification
- Prevention
- Self-Management
- Treatment



**Musculoskeletal Health**

- Identification
- Prevention
- Self-Management
- Treatment



**Lifestyles**

- Smoking
- Alcohol and substance use
- Healthy eating, drinking & weight
- Physical activity
- Active travel

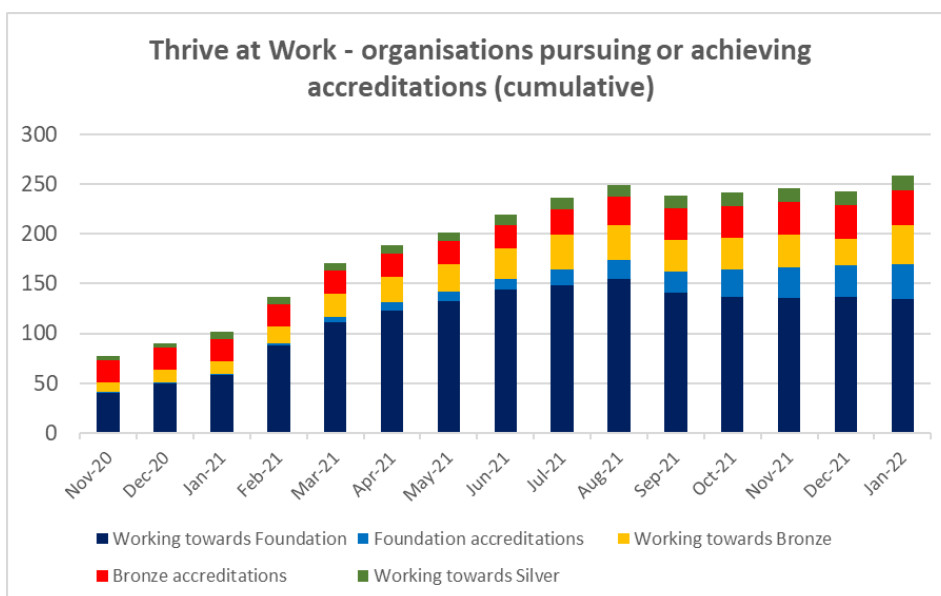


**External risks to Health**

- Financial health
- Domestic abuse
- Caring responsibilities

### 3.2 Current performance and activities:

- Over 500 organisations are currently signed up to the programme, with 15 new registrations in January;
- 135 organisations are working towards Foundation level accreditation;
- 40 organisations are working towards Bronze level accreditation;
- 14 organisations are working towards Silver level accreditation.
- 34 organisations are accredited at Foundation level – including, in January 2022, Dudley Lodge Safeguarding Children Services, Lincolnshire Coop and Support Staffordshire;
- 35 organisations are accredited at Bronze level – including ‘Steps to Work’ in January 2022;
- There were 158 new organisations engaged (i.e. actively made aware of the programme) in January 2022;



**Accredited organisations include:**



### 3.3 Case study example of programme benefits – ‘Steps to Work’

*Steps to Work, a charity based in Walsall which has been running for over 20 years, were one of the very first organisations that registered to complete Thrive at Work in 2018. They have now achieved Bronze accreditation and are currently working towards Silver level accreditation.*

*They have over 100 employees and provide employment support services to local residents that require support and additional skills to gain employment.*

*Senior management is committed to the well-being of staff. Raj Sarai, HR Manager, has been responsible for driving this forward alongside the Health & Wellbeing Lead, Ayesha Farooq, under the direction of Bhanu Dhir, CEO. Raj, who was also instrumental in Steps to Work’s decision to join the programme, said ‘wellbeing is now part of what we do’.*

*During the accreditation interviews, it became very apparent that the influence of the CEO, Bhanu Dhir, was significant in improving the supportive culture within the organisation. Staff stated that they ‘now feel more connected’ and acknowledged that there was a positive shift in the culture of the organisation since Bhanu became CEO.*

*Wellbeing meetings were introduced to support staff, as a result of Thrive at Work, which provided regular opportunities for line managers to ensure that the wellbeing needs of their staff were being regularly reviewed. This initiative may also be connected to the lower rate of stress and anxiety-related employee absences now being reported.*

*Staff are more aware and open to the importance of maintaining good mental health. Steps to Work, have taken many actions to continuously chip away at the stigmas associated with this and normalising open and honest communication within the workplace.*

*Staff now have access to information and support to enable them to manage their own mental and emotional wellbeing as a result of Thrive at Work. Steps to Work also offer all employees the opportunity to undertake Mental Health First Aid training. Bereavement sessions were also run to support employees with the increased bereavements that staff were experiencing as a result of the pandemic.*

*Ayesha, from the charity, said, “Steps to Work are really happy and excited to have received the Bronze accreditation. The Thrive at Work programme has supported us as an employer to focus on our employees’ mental health and wellbeing. The programme helps to create a structure of support that can be easily implemented in supporting and educating employees regarding mental health, musculoskeletal and promoting healthy lifestyles. Since implementing the programme, we have received a positive response from our employees. We now hope to achieve the Silver and Gold accreditation.”*

### **3.4 Emerging programme impact work**

- 3.4.1 Whilst there is a good amount of positive qualitative case study materials, Thrive at Work was not originally set up in a way that systematically captured quantitative evidence of impact – in such terms as the workforce and financial costs of sickness and turnover. A significant benefit of the programme has been enabling organisations to implement important wellbeing infrastructure – work is underway to capture more details on this.
- 3.4.2 This ongoing need to provide evidence of impact and ‘return on investment’ for WMCA, for MHPP and for external funders, has led to retrospective work being undertaken to generate further evidence. This will particularly focus on the respective journeys of organisations from their baseline signing up position to their position against the programme criteria at accreditation (or post-accreditation). Work to further develop the Thrive at Work model will include steps to embed key ‘success measures’ to ensure that impact can be systematically captured and monitored. This will be undertaken in conjunction with MHPP partners.
- 3.4.3 The impact of the pandemic on organisations, e.g. in terms of sickness levels, staff turnover and general organisational capacity, is inevitably complicating the work to assess programme impact.

### **4. Business development work and programme continuity**

- 4.1 Thrive at Work has been dependent on grant funding and the potential cessation of funding at the end of June 2022 poses a significant challenge to the programme. With the available programme underspend, there is the potential to extend the programme (and associated staffing) for a further 3 months until the end of September 2022.
- 4.2 MHPP work is underway between January and June 2022, which WMCA is involved in, to explore opportunities to refresh the focus and revenue options for the wider programme.
- 4.3 The COVID-19 pandemic has generated higher levels of awareness of the importance of the ‘work and health’ agenda – with challenges from sickness, furlough, redundancy and the transformation of working practices (including working from home).
- 4.4 The latest data for the WMCA area shows that around 25% of those who are economically active are away from the labour market because of either short-term or long-term health conditions. Alongside this, a high level of unfilled vacancies is creating skills and capacity shortages for employers, holding back their businesses and economic growth. As such, it remains extremely important that the ‘health and

work' agenda continues to be pursued – helping economically inactive people into work and supporting employers to be able to retain their existing staff, supporting a strengthening of workplace health and well-being infrastructure and organisational culture.

- 4.5 Support offers in the health and work 'market' have also changed since 2018, with new market entrants, such as offers from Investors In People and Mental Health First Aid England. Also, there is a clearer focus on what constitutes 'good work' – a potential area for further consideration and activity.
- 4.6 WMCA is has commenced business development work, in consultation with a number of stakeholders, to:
- a) Consider options to refresh the Thrive model to respond to current circumstances and 'market needs' and to consider which other 'support tools' it should potentially be aligned with.
  - b) Consider options for Thrive at Work revenue and organisational form that would enable the programme to develop and be financially sustainable beyond current grant funding arrangements.
- 4.7 The business development exercise will be concluded by the end of March 2022, generating initial proposals for consideration. Emerging feedback from the exercise include:
- a) Give further consideration to the target market /markets and, therefore, give consideration to developing a differentiated product or products which meet the different needs of different organisations (reflecting organisational type, size, capacity, organisational maturity in respect of wellbeing issues, etc.);
  - b) Initial market research indicates two different model options (which are not mutually exclusive):
    - the provision of a set of curated and freely available online resources, with limited support to organisations; or
    - a paid-for service with a significant level of support provided by the Thrive at Work team.
  - c) Refreshing the approach to accreditation, which might feel to some as 'all or nothing', by developing a modular approach to assessing and recognising progress. For instance, there can be milestones on the journey to general accreditation at a particular level, e.g. programme recognition of all key enablers being in place.
  - d) Considering refreshing the breadth of the model to more broadly consider the key components of a 'good workplace'. This could include additional health-related components, such as further support to employers / employees on neurodiversity and, also, key women's health issues, including the menopause.

- 4.8 WMCA are keen to secure further feedback in the next few weeks from key stakeholders, including reps from constituent organisations, to support further support the thinking around business development.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There is external grant funding via MHPP which funds Thrive at Work until end of June 2022. Due to programme underspend thus far, which can be used through a 'no cost extension' as agreed with funders, the programme has sufficient funds to continue to operate for an additional 3 months until the end of September 2022.

- 5.2 The outcome of an MHPP funding bid to the Department of Health and Social Care, is awaited; this would potentially provide external grant funding for Thrive at Work until March 2024.

- 5.3 There is a provision in the 2022/23 Wellbeing portfolio budget to extend the programme through to end of March 2023, should the funding bid outlined in 5.2 not be successful. This however is subject to approval based on evidence of continuing impact and 'return on investment'.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

## **7. Equalities Implications**

- 7.1 The Thrive at Work programme seeks to support organisations, including small and medium sized enterprises, to create a culture and arrangements which actively support the health and wellbeing of employees, thereby supporting the ongoing development of inclusive workplaces.

## **8. Inclusive Growth Implications**

- 8.1 The Thrive at Work programme has largely positive inclusive growth implications, as it aims to grow the assumption that work should be something that enables citizens to be healthy. It particularly relates to the Inclusive Economy and Health and Wellbeing fundamentals in this regard. This work is therefore timely, as it will ensure that the value of what has been delivered to date can be taken forward, in a way which continues to benefit employees across the region.

## **9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications**

- 9.1 The work of the Wellbeing Board applies to relevant activity across both Constituent and Non-constituent areas.

## **10. Other Implications**

- 10.1 There are workforce implications arising from the outcome of the funding decision.

## **11. Schedule of Background Papers**





**West Midlands**  
Combined Authority

11.1 None