

## **A Healthier, Happier You at Antrim Borough Council Our Well-being Programme: “Looking After Yourself”**

### **BACKGROUND: OUR WORKPLACE**

Antrim Borough Council has a strong track record in delivering excellent customer focused services with a vision that the Borough will be a “place for all”. We recognise that there are economic and social benefits in working to improve the health and well-being of everyone within the community, including Council staff. A holistic well-being programme was therefore developed to support the delivery of our Health, Safety and Well-being Strategy and embed a culture of health and well-being across Council.

Our Council became an accredited Employer of Choice in 2007 and is focused on ensuring that Council is a great place to work.

Well-Being and Work Life Balance are key policies to ensure that employees experience a work environment which is modern, innovative, challenging and rewarding.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The aim of Council’s Strategy is to embed a culture of health, safety and well-being with all of its employees. Council recognises that staff are its most valuable asset and that it is only possible to deliver excellent, value for money services to customers if our employees are able to attend work and carry out their roles safely. From an employee perspective, well-being is much more than prevention of ill health; it is a key contributor to their quality of life.

One of the key components of our Strategy is to enable staff to take responsibility for their health, safety and well-being both in the workplace and home life. One of the main actions to achieve this was to set up a holistic Well-being Programme.

### **OBJECTIVES**

To achieve the Well-being Programme we identified three key objectives:

1. To develop and embed a culture of health and well-being through holistic approaches
2. Equip employees to take responsibility for their own well-being
3. Contribute to the performance of the Council in difficult economic times through innovative recognition of the contribution of each individual.

This Programme is directly linked to Council’s Employer of Choice Accreditation and compliance with the Health and Safety Executives Stress Management Standards.

### **IDENTIFYING OUR NEEDS**

In 2008 Council conducted a work-life balance /stress audit using the Health and Safety Executive Stress Management Standards to focus our attention on the needs of staff.

To obtain further detail we set up focus groups to identify any underlying causes and following the feedback from the focus groups a Council wide well-being risk assessment and associated action plan were developed to address the main areas of concern.

Based on all of this information we were able to create our Well-being Programme.

## **CREATING OUR WELL-BEING PROGRAMME – “Looking after yourself”**

Council had a wide range of separate initiatives already in place which we combined into this new, comprehensive and integrated Well-being Programme which was available to all our employees.

Examples of our initiatives were:

- 1. Innovative Work-Life Balance Policy which gives individuals the opportunity to submit any request they wish tailored to suit their personal circumstances with no parameters to the scheme e.g. requests for leave to complete personal development qualifications, home working to facilitate caring for sick relatives, reduced or more flexible working hours etc**
- 2. Individual Wellbeing Action Plans (integrated with managing attendance policies and rehabilitation)** - access to Physiotherapy, Rehabilitation, Phased Return, working with external agencies to provide additional support as and when needed (ie Disability NI)
3. Healthy Lifestyle Scheme to encourage employees to combine an active lifestyle with healthy eating.
4. Innovative Wellbeing Events tailored to address top causes of absence – Stress, Musculoskeletal, infections etc.
5. Coaching cultures and line management development
6. Learning Weeks to support a culture of wellbeing
7. Employee Services – Carecall counselling, occupational health, health screening and employee cash plans
8. Communication – wide range to meet various needs including Staff Magazine, Intranet, Feedback Boxes, Team Meetings and Employee Surveys

The programme is continually revitalised in order to remain relevant and aligned to the needs of employees who deliver our services.

The two main components of our Programme are the “flexible working” (Work-Life Balance) and “Well-being Action Plans”.

(1) Our Well-being Programme is completely flexible enabling all individuals to apply for work life balance with no restrictions. All requests are considered and individuals design their own work-life balance solutions. Applications are approved where it is possible to provide for it operationally. This new approach achieved a significant increase in the number of applications for “Work Life Balance” over the last three years with the majority of these covering a range of issues such as eldercare, further education, child care etc.

This approach has been well received by staff with 30% of the workforce having submitted work-life balance applications. There are no barriers to applications; there’s just a consistent approach to scrutinising each application.

(2) Well-Being Action Plans are individual risk assessments which allow the employee to meet with the Health, Safety and Well-being Advisor and then the Manager to agree and implement a plan to improve their well-being over time. These can range from work or personal issues with a plan being agreed incorporating various elements of the Well-being Programme. Realistic actions with the employee are agreed and whatever support is needed is provided.

We have moved away from having any set predefined policies and instead established principles of how any requests around well-being would be treated. Every employee is an individual where one size does not fit all.

Both of these components encourage all employees to work in partnership with their line manager to develop their own personally tailored well-being action plans focusing on tools which best address their needs at a point in time. The fundamental aim of the work is to create a culture where employees take responsibility for their own health and well-being.

## **MANAGING THE WELL-BEING PROGRAMME**

There are a number of key team players who support the Well-being Programme:

- **Internal champion** – Our Director of Corporate Services regulates, provides leadership, support and resources to enable Managers and the Employer of Choice Working Group to implement actions.
- **Project manager** – Our Assistant Director of Human Resources oversees the management of the programme ensuring delivery of key targets and driving forward changes and improvements as needed.
- **Day to day implementation** – Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Advisor implements the programme on a daily basis meeting with Managers/ staff/ external agencies, as well as promoting and setting up well-being events.
- **Action planning and implementation** - Employer of Choice Working Group drive continuous improvement and provide 'quality assurance'

The team's role is to set the vision and the direction as well as facilitate the programme. Our well-being programme would not be possible unless the rest of our organisation buys into it.

## **ENGAGING “NOT DIS-ENGAGING” OUR EMPLOYEES**

The Well-being programme is a unique and innovate approach to fully engaging employees across the Council. The programme includes individually tailored plans and programmes that are agreed through a partnership between line managers, employees and human resources and we seek to take a holistic and integrated approach to issues. The programme therefore secures sustainable results at individual and organisational levels, the most significant result being that absenteeism was reduced by 18% during 2010-2011 and 25% the year before that.

Flexible working is a key element of Council's overall Well-being Programme and plays a vital role in minimising absenteeism, maximising employee satisfaction and engagement and enabling employees to develop their own solutions to work life balance issues.

In order to fully engage all staff, senior management have fully cascaded a coaching approach throughout Council and this included a number of management workshops to develop skills in coaching as well as awareness sessions for everyone to seek to fully embed a coaching culture. The personal development planning process has also been adapted to focus on coaching this year.

We also use a “Talkback” system to enable staff to forward ideas or ask questions but the primary method of listening to employees is through the line manager and our latest audit (2011) showed that 89% of employees confirmed that their manager

had an “open door” approach. Line Managers have been fully trained to adopt a coaching style which focuses on listening to employees and encouraging them to fulfil their potential.

## **MONITORING OUR WELL-BEING PROGRAMME – CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Council has in place an Employer of Choice Working Group which is made up of representatives from right across the Council as well as Union representatives. The Council’s Employer of Choice Working Group monitor progress and receive updates on progress the implementation of the Corporate Well-being Action Plan.

We survey our employees regularly on work life balance issues and incorporate the Health and Safety Executive Stress Management Standards within the survey. Our results have demonstrated that employees believe Council values staff and that relationships are good in the workplace.

When we re-audited again three years later in 2011 using the work-life balance/ HSE Stress Management Standards these highlighted major improvements:

- Improvements in staff relationships
- Managers “open door” approach
- Council values staff
- Clear expectations in work and
- Staff were able to contribute to change.

The focus on the person developing their own solutions has prompted individuals to think differently about how they work. Staff are creative and innovative in their approach and are continually looking for different ways of working resulting in ongoing improvements.

We will re-audit our whole process again in the future using the HSE Management Standards and the well-being audit and re-vitalise our process all over again.

## **HOW OUR WELL-BEING PROGRAMME MEASURES UP: THE HEALTHY BOTTOM LINE**

Achievements were realised in a number of areas ranging from individual case studies to corporate measures of performance. The main points are summarised:

<b>Absenteeism</b>	Average days lost reduced as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12.9 days in 2009</li> <li>• 9.63 days in 2010</li> <li>• <b>7.9 days in 2011</b> (a reduction of one working week per employee).</li> </ul>
<b>Finance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced absenteeism 2009 – 2011 £240,000 direct salary savings £27,000 indirect salary savings</li> <li>• Work life balance application 2010 - 2011 £52,000 with on-going savings</li> <li>• Occupational nurse on site one day per month as opposed to referrals to consultant £10,000 saved</li> <li>• Ongoing efficiency savings year on year.</li> </ul>

<b>Engagement</b>	<p>Internal survey results demonstrated improvements and Council successfully obtained Best Companies Ones To Watch Accreditation for 2012 with high scores in the area of work life balance. Indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 93% believe staff relationships are good</li> <li>• 90% read the staff magazine</li> <li>• 89% believe their manager has an ‘open door’ approach</li> <li>• 64% of employees are members of the healthy lifestyle scheme.</li> </ul>
<b>Reputation / External benchmarks Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)</b>	<p>During 2012 Council became the only organisation in both the public and private sector in Northern Ireland to have reached the finals of the prestigious national CIPD People Management Awards. We were shortlisted in the Health and Well-being category during a year which attracted a record number of nominations including entries from some of the most successful global companies including Marks and Spencers, Coco Cola and Dell. To have reached the finals was a remarkable achievement and Mayor, Councillor Roy Thompson said “I am delighted that Antrim has been shortlisted for these highly regarded awards. It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of Council staff that we have got through to this stage”.</p>
<b>Reputation/ External Benchmarks</b>	<p>Council’s approach to health and wellbeing was audited by the HSENI in 2010 and 2012 and the results are excellent with comments including:</p> <p><i>‘In our view Antrim Borough Council continues to provide an excellent health and well-being commitment to its staff and fully satisfies all requirements of HSENI in this area and to the management of workplace stress.’</i></p>
<b>Civic Leadership</b>	<p>As part of its role as a civic leader, Council hosts best practice events for employers in the Borough to share best practice for example in terms of health and wellbeing and innovation. One event focused on health and wellbeing and other private, public, voluntary and community sector local employers were invited to showcase how they have effectively managed health and wellbeing and secured performance improvements as a result. Hence, our achievements have had an even greater impact on Council fulfilling its role as a civic leader.</p>

**EXTERNAL RECOGNITION:**

Council has been recognised for their achievements as follows:

<b>Area</b>	<b>Performance</b>
<b>Innovation Award</b>	Council received a special Innovation Award in 2007 in connection with Employer of Choice Accreditation, in recognition the unique approach to work-life balance.
<b>NI Best Practice Scheme</b>	Council was recognised as an exemplar of best practice in the area of work-life balance and well-being and hosted the opening event in 2008.
<b>“Best Companies”</b>	“Best companies One to Watch Accreditation” for 2012.
<b>Shortlisted for CIPD Award in the Health and Well-being Category</b>	Antrim Borough Council has become the only organisation in both the public and private sector in Northern Ireland to have reached the finals of the prestigious, national Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development’s <i>People Management Awards</i> .

### **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP:**

As Civic Leaders the Council is keen to share the learning with other organisations in the province and in partnership with private sector organisations. Our aim is to engage with others in the public sector in Northern Ireland as well as private businesses in the borough, community and voluntary sectors.

In our own organisation we have made a difference by helping people to remain in work and enabling them to perform through their difficult circumstances. As that has made a difference to us as a small organisation maybe our approach could make a difference on a bigger scale. We have a golden opportunity as Civic Leaders to share out learning more widely externally and look forward to working with other organisations in Northern Ireland.

We are also working with the Health and Safety Executive NI to share knowledge and best practice.

### **FINALLY: WELL-BEING “FIT FOR THE FUTURE”**

The basic part of the plan is to keep on doing what we’re doing because it’s working for the organisation and we want to build on that. We’re constantly looking at what we’re doing and if we can add to the programme, find different ways to accommodate people and do more best practice events. We want to keep making it better; we’re changing constantly so we never sit still.

Health and Well-being remains a key priority for Council and this is reflected in the Health, Safety & Well-being Strategy, supported by the Employer of Choice Action Plan. Council continues to make every effort to ensure that all of our staff receives the practical help and support they need to become healthier, and ultimately happier!

**Catherine McFarland**  
**Director Corporate Services**

## **EXAMPLES IN PRACTICE:**

### **Case Study (1) – Work Life Balance/Wellbeing Planning**

Jill requested a reduction in working hours following the birth of her children and this was granted. As her circumstances changed she requested an increase in working hours and this was possible when an opportunity arose to retrain into a higher grade post. Jill performed successfully in the new role but she was involved in an accident resulting in long term absence. Through an individual Wellbeing Action Plan Jill was successfully rehabilitated back to work. Jill's attendance improved significantly following participation in a series of health initiatives which Jill described as real 'turning points' for her. She now plans to train as a coach. This demonstrates Jill has taken responsibility for her own health and wellbeing and the culture is further embedded as she is a motivational example to others.

### **Case Study (2): Rehabilitation/Wellbeing Planning**

Bill had a serious motorcycle accident resulting in permanent back and pelvic damage. An individual action plan was agreed to assist Bill to return to work. This included adjusted working hours and duties for 6 weeks and access to the Healthy Lifestyle Scheme at the Leisure Centre outside the normal times. This reduced the absence duration and the overall cost/impact of the absence. Bill was involved in another accident and he asked Council to assist with physiotherapy because of lengthy waiting times for the health service. This was arranged resulting in an earlier return to work. Bill was committed to taking responsibility for his own health and well-being with support from the Council.