

Employers Showcase – Case Studies

Demonstrate Senior Level Buy-In



Harrow Council is responsible for running a wide range of local services in the borough such as

- Adults Social Care
- Children's Social Care
- Environmental Health
- Parking Services
- Public Health
- Waste Management
- Streets & Parks Maintenance
- Housing
- Libraries, arts & culture
- LEA Functions
- Benefits Administration

The Council has approximately 2,500 employees, a controllable budget of £180m, and operates across multiple sites.

The London Borough of Harrow has approximately 250,000 residents and is one of the most religiously & ethnically diverse places in the UK.

As an organisation we are keen to support positive mental health in the Council workforce & community, tackle inequalities in mental health, and address discrimination against people with mental illness.

Mental health problems are the greatest danger to our wellbeing today (with 1 in 4 people suffering from mental illness in any given year - approximately 50,000 people in Harrow), and are also the biggest threat to success and productivity in the workplace. The cost to the UK economy of mental health problems is estimated at £105bn per year (which works out as around £0.5bn per year in Harrow alone).

What we did to start addressing this

Following unanimous agreement at a full council meeting to sign up to the national local authority mental health challenge –

Harrow Council appointed **2 Senior Level Mental Health Champions**

1. Councillor Kareema Marikar
2. Corporate Director of Resources Tom Whiting)

Together they have shared the task of developing and implementing a mental health campaign – **to raise awareness of and challenge the stigma around mental health** Tom has since spoken at Time to Change Employers Masterclasses on this issue.

We faced a considerable challenge in developing our campaign due to limited resources, as Council budgets are constrained due to a combination of factors such as the impact of government austerity measures, cost inflation, and simultaneous increases in demand for key public services such as Adult & Children's Social Care. This not only limits the resources available to support our initiative to improve mental wellbeing, but also concurrently increases pressures on our workforce (thereby potentially increasing the risk of their suffering from mental illness) – due to:

- **Same work, fewer people**
- **Multiple reorganisations**
- **Community impact of changes**
- **Ongoing pace of change**

We therefore opted to develop a mental health action plan consisting of a year's worth of low-budget, high-impact wellbeing activities. From our early research and initial meetings we developed a strong interest in signing the Time to Change Pledge, as we recognised that it had made a significant positive impact in reducing the stigma around mental illness. We also knew that signing the pledge would enable us to maximise our campaign's impact, by providing us with useful, practical support in:

- **Developing a comprehensive action plan (in line with TTC's 7 key principles)**
- **Understanding best practice in implementing effective employer mental health campaigns**
- **Enabling us to access a wide range of free wellbeing resources (including publications, publicity resources, and a comprehensive communications pack to help disseminate information about your campaign)**

These free resources were particularly valuable for a campaign such as ours which was on a 'shoestring' budget.

We were also further encouraged to sign the pledge as a result of our very positive and constructive interactions with the team at Time to Change. Their team have been consistently responsive, friendly, and helpful throughout our campaign – and individuals such as Karen Shaw and Sebastian have gone above and beyond to ensure that our project is successfully implemented.

On 11th May, the Council signed the Employer Pledge with a public event hosted at the Council Civic Centre and attended by a wide range of public, private, and voluntary sector organisations, as well as Council staff. Karen Shaw (Time to Change's Programme Manager) helped us on the day by attending the event, managing a stall, and delivering a speech on the wider Time to Change campaign.

Senior level buy in, visible senior leadership & endorsement of our campaign have provided significant benefits to our overall impact in terms of helping us to raise awareness and break down the stigma around discussing mental wellbeing in the workplace.

We started our campaign by appointing two senior-level mental health champions (Corporate Director of Resources, and our Councillor Scrutiny Policy Lead for Health), and have been fortunate in that these champions have a genuine passion and dedication for improving mental health awareness in the workplace and wider borough. Our champions have utilized their roles and influence to help our campaign in many ways including:

- **Assembling a project management steering group consisting of Councillors/Council Officers - to facilitate the development, review, and implementation of our action plan**
- **Providing a public voice for and to publicize our campaign**
- **Raising the topic of mental wellbeing at Board and Scrutiny Committee meetings - to help embed it into all areas of the organisation and attract further senior-level support**
- **Enabling us to build connections with other organisations and both internal & external mental health initiatives – such as Thrive London**

In addition to our two champions, we have also been able to secure public support from the **Council Leader, Chief Executive, Mayor of Harrow and Councillors from both parties** – all of whom attended and/or delivered speeches at our public Time to Change pledge-signing event. The senior leaders spoke openly about their own mental health and the reasons why they attach great importance to the subject.

To capture the interest of other senior leaders within the Council (besides our mental health champions), we kept them well-informed – sharing our action plan with them and reporting upon the progress made in its implementation/future plans, highlighted the significant positive impact which the wider Time to Change campaign had already made in raising mental health awareness, and asked for their feedback on our action plan (such as by presenting the Action Plan to our Corporate Equalities Group meetings for them to review).

We were fortunate in that our campaign revolved around senior level buy-in from the beginning, however in **terms of attracting wider senior level support**, we found the **following steps to be most effective**:

- Keep them well informed about the campaign's objectives & achievements to date
- Involve them in the decision-making process & demonstrate that you value their feedback
- Take time to demonstrate how the campaign aligns with the organisation's values and objectives – for example, it may be effective to highlight the facts & statistics on how mental illness can affect levels of staff productivity and morale. It could also be a good idea to show senior leaders how signing the TTC pledge provides a tangible public employer commitment which helps with ethical reputation and may attract a broader range of new recruits.

Our experience has shown that attracting senior level buy-in provides a significant boost to the campaign, in terms of increasing its perceived credibility, reaching wider staff audiences, and enabling us to build and develop strong connections with additional senior level managers and external organisation representatives.

