

SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL

Subject : Consideration of Counselling Support for Staff
Committee : Governance, Policy & Personnel Committee
Date : 28 July 2025
Author : Tracy Adams, Head of HR

1. Report Summary:

- 1.1. This report requests the Committee to consider, as a position of principle, whether the Council should offer paid-for counselling support to staff experiencing stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges. If agreed the full costings and service offered will be reported during the budget setting process.

2. Background:

- 2.1. Between August 2024 and July 2025, the Council recorded:
 - 2.1.1. 206 working days lost due to absences described as stress, anxiety or related mental health reasons.
 - 2.1.2. 10 individual employees had at least one absence recorded with the reason 'stress' or 'anxiety'.
 - 2.1.3. The average length of absence was 10 working days, with a range from 1 day to 84 days.
- 2.2. National trends identify that stress-related absences remain one of the leading causes of sickness absence in the public sector.
- 2.3. During return to work interviews it has been reported that staff are experiencing problems with accessing appropriate interventions, with very long waiting lists. This may impact on their ability to return to work in a timely manner.
- 2.4. Absences due to stress and anxiety can have a significant impact, including:
 - 2.4.1. **Operational disruption:** Delays to service delivery, increased pressure on other staff to cover.
 - 2.4.2. **Increased management time:** Absence management, return-to-work discussions, and occupational health referrals.
 - 2.4.3. **Employee wellbeing:** Prolonged or unsupported mental health issues can increase the risk of longer-term sickness or resignation.
 - 2.4.4. **Cost to the Council:** While some costs are indirect, long-term absence may lead to temporary staffing costs or reduced capacity.
- 2.5. National research, including from the CIPD and NICE, shows that early access to counselling or talking therapies can significantly reduce the length and recurrence of stress-related absences. The CIPD's *Health and Wellbeing at Work 2024* report highlights that employers who invest in early mental health support see better employee outcomes and improved attendance.

2.6. At this stage, no budget is allocated for counselling support. The purpose of this report is to ask the Committee to consider, in principle, whether they support the idea of offering access to counselling for staff in future.

2.7. If supported, this would allow the Head of HR to:

2.7.1. Develop options and costings, such as per-session rates or an annual subscription to an external provider.

2.7.2. Include a provisional sum in budget setting proposals for 2026/27.

2.8. The suit are unanimous in their support of these recommendations.

3. Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Committee:

3.1. Notes the current levels and impact of mental health related absence.

3.2. Agrees in principle to support offering access to paid-for Counselling for staff, subject to budget setting process.

3.3. Authorises the Head of HR to explore options and include costings in forthcoming budget planning proposals.

Wards Affected: All

Background papers: None.

Implications

Financial: To be considered as part of budget setting.

Legal: The employer has a duty under health and safety legislation to avoid risk where possible. SMT feel that this recommendation assists the impact of the individual and impact on the organisation.

Personnel: As stated in the report.

Environmental Impact: None.

Equalities Impact Statement: Service would be offered to all staff.