

Case Study

North Wales Fire & Rescue Service

Healthy Working Wales Platinum Corporate Health Standard Award



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Fire and Rescue Service

About us

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) helps to protect an estimated population of 678,461 people over an area of 2,400 square miles as well as hundreds of thousands of tourists and visitors who come to North Wales every year.

There are around 317,051 domestic properties and 24,484 non-domestic properties in North Wales that fall under our protection. The Service employs almost 1,000 staff in operational and support roles.

Annually we attend around 3,200 fires, 500 road traffic collisions and 500 other emergency incidents. We also attend around 3,600 false alarms of various kinds every year. We carry out extensive work with schools, businesses and local communities to promote fire safety and prevention.

Highlights

- As a Healthy Working Wales Gold and Platinum Corporate Health Award holder, we are proud of our achievements and ongoing pledge to support the health and wellbeing of employees.
- We set up a transition cell to achieve a systems change in ways of working while continuing to respond to the urgent challenges of the pandemic.
- Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group, and its associated policies, evidence a demonstrable set of health and wellbeing principles, providing a strong foundation for delivering new ways of working.
- We moved to large-scale, agile working overnight then looked at whether arrangements could be made permanent and how the workplace could look and operate post-pandemic.
- A focus group of staff from different parts of the Service together with staff surveys are used to seek employee experiences and views on remote working to inform future practices.
- The Health and Fitness Team run 'Workout Wednesday' on the staff online platform to promote good physical and mental health - due to popular demand, this has been extended to include 'Fitness Friday' workouts with recordings available to anyone who misses the live session.
- Our surveys have shown employees have felt more motivated, more engaged and have described benefits in terms of work-life balance and increased levels of physical and mental wellbeing.

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Implementing a Transition Cell

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, NWFRS was tasked with facilitating a co-ordinated response to continue the delivery of our services, maintain the safety and wellbeing of staff as well as members of the public, and reduce our impact on the environment through the innovative use of technology.

Our focus was to adopt a new work model following consideration of its impact on staff wellbeing and workplace health alongside meeting wider organisational priorities. We achieved this by setting up a transition cell to mobilise the work, using key elements of corporate policy, NWFRS core values and business continuity principles to achieve a systems change...all in response to the urgent challenges presented by the pandemic.

As a holder of the Healthy Working Wales (HWW) Gold and Platinum Corporate Health Standards, at NWFRS we are proud of our achievements and ongoing pledge to support the health and wellbeing of employees. Our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group, and its associated policies, evidence a demonstrable set of health and wellbeing principles, providing a strong foundation for delivering this task. When considering any level of organisational change, we ensure that our workforce is at the heart of all communication, offering employees opportunities to contribute to proposals via corporate communication channels.

Agile working

Our first task was to introduce and implement agile working across the organisation. This new concept included a variety of workplace options, beyond an employee's designated base, and explored various options such as working from home or from another service location.

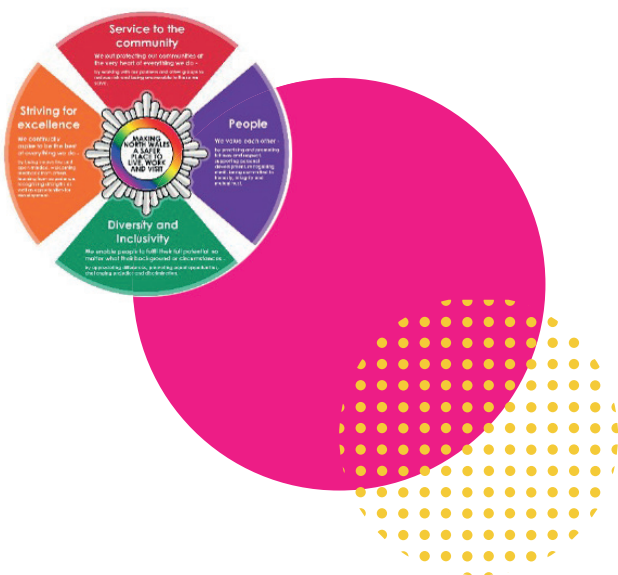
The Service moved to large-scale homeworking overnight when Covid-19 lockdown arrangements were introduced. As the Welsh Government started to ease restrictions, the Service explored whether or not the arrangements for longer term agile working could be made permanent - and how the workplace could look and operate post-pandemic.

Over time, employees have been approached for their views and experiences (via surveys and focus groups) of working remotely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, a focus group consisting of staff from different areas of the Service was established to obtain views about continuing with agile working on a permanent basis. It is important to NWFRS that employees are involved in discussions surrounding working arrangements and that we use our communication channels to enable this.

The elements currently being considered in relation to permanent agile working include:

- Employee and role suitability
- Fairness and consistency
- Hours of work
- Office cover
- Communication, contact and accessibility
- Personal costs and expenses
- Office base/mileage
- Confidentiality/GDPR
- Employee welfare
- Recruitment and contracts



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Promoting physical and mental wellbeing

The Health and Fitness team continued to promote the importance of maintaining good physical and mental health as well as highlighting a range of other health and wellbeing topics.

In support of employee mental and physical fitness, 'Workout Wednesday' features on our online platform, 'Y Sbardun', providing live workouts from our Fitness Team. Due to an increase in demand, 'Fitness Friday' has also been introduced with the live broadcast followed by access to the recorded workouts for those unable to join the live sessions.

All employees were encouraged to undertake a risk assessment and Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment for home working and then supported to adopt evidence based principles to enable a healthy working environment. Our Physical Fitness Advisors developed a 'desk stretch' video which was shared on our staff Facebook page, and employees are supported to take regular breaks from their desk space and engage in regular activity via a weekly brief communication.

"I have taken part in the weekly fitness and mindfulness sessions and have found these to be of great benefit to my health and wellbeing"

Impacts

The feedback from employees is generally positive. Survey responses received have demonstrated that employees have felt more motivated, more engaged and have described benefits in terms of work-life balance and increased levels of physical and mental wellbeing. A resounding 100% of respondents agreed that more meetings should be conducted online in future.

Lessons learnt

Our previous work with HWW informed our decision making processes. Holding both the Gold and Platinum Corporate Health Standard awards has meant that we were well prepared to continue to look after the health and wellbeing of our staff during this unprecedented and challenging time.