

Case Study

Public Health Wales

Healthy Working Wales Gold Corporate Health Standard Award



Public Health Wales (PHW) employs approximately 1900 staff at 50 sites throughout Wales. PHW exists to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of the Welsh population and to reduce inequalities in health with a vision to achieve a healthier, happier and fairer Wales. PHW is part of the NHS and reports to the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Government. PHW works locally, nationally and, with partners, across communities.

Our role as the national public health agency of Wales means we have been at the forefront of managing the response to the pandemic and we had to respond quickly at the end of January 2020. It was recognised that teams from across the organisation were required to support the pandemic response. One month later, following the first positive case of Covid-19 in Wales, this support was rapidly scaled up and, with the exception of a few business critical departments, became the sole organisational priority.

Highlights

- As a lead organisation for the pandemic response in Wales we have had to adapt quickly whilst leading by example in providing a safe working environment for our staff.
- We rolled out a personal risk assessment tool to all staff to identify and respond to the needs of those more vulnerable to the effects of Covid-19.
- Many staff have continued to come to the workplace to carry out the pandemic response so we rapidly implemented safe physical distancing and hygiene working practices.
- We have increased communications and engagement with staff, including seeking feedback through a staff survey, and done everything we can to ensure staff feel supported.
- The PHW 'How are you doing' campaign was launched to support the people of Wales, including our staff, and we also introduced 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' for staff.
- We have commissioned an independent assessment of our Covid-19 workplace preparedness to learn any lessons.
- Employee wellbeing practices embedded from being part of the Healthy Working Wales process gave us a firm grounding for responding to the needs of our employees during the pandemic.
- Our experience of responding to the pandemic has provided insights into what the workplace might look like in the future and allowed us to get ready for new ways of working.

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Home working

Staff were asked to work from home, in line with government advice, when not working in the national response centre. All staff are asked to complete an individual risk assessment every 6 months to identify those in a potentially vulnerable group to identify and support staff with a higher risk of developing more serious symptoms if they were to contract the Covid-19 virus.

Staff have been able to borrow IT equipment to enable them to work from home and are asked to complete a Display Screen Equipment assessment to ensure that home working areas are set up correctly. A presentation has been produced to show how this can be done and anyone needing additional support can contact a trained DSE assessor.

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has been developed to address any queries staff have about working arrangements going forward and home working guidance for employees and managers has also been produced.

Communication

Staff information pages were revised to include FAQs and information specific to COVID-19 and were moved from our intranet to the internet to facilitate easier access for those staff unable to access the intranet whilst home working.

A recommendation was made that no face-to-face meetings with external stakeholders should be organised at any of our sites and meeting rooms display a notice showing the number of people allowed at internal meetings to enable social distancing. Microsoft Teams has been made available to all staff to support better collaboration and teamwork and is used for virtual meetings.

Introducing safe working practices

Safe working practices were rapidly established in the three regional contact centres aimed at reducing the potential for spreading infections. These measures have been refined and enhanced over time in line with Welsh Government guidelines.

The Estates, Facilities and Health & Safety Team have been working hard to ensure that our workplaces are safe for all staff. This includes removing IT equipment from some desks to ensure social distancing, clearing all desks of personal items so they can easily be kept clean and used by others, making sure staff clean desk areas before and after use, and provision of cleaning products and hand sanitising equipment.

Other measures include one way systems supported by reprogramming of doors to only open one way, floor markings and notices, and one way staircases as well as occupancy of lifts and toilet blocks restricted to one person (utilising a small cone to show when the room is occupied for the latter).

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Employee wellbeing

We launched a new wellbeing campaign to address the negative impact of COVID-19 on the mental, physical and social wellbeing of people in Wales. The 'How are you doing?' campaign was created to support the people of Wales to look after their wellbeing and to ensure public health was protected during the isolation period. It includes advice and information and links to toolkits and support services. This was promoted to staff via the PHW internet pages.

In parallel, we launched a new internal initiative to support staff wellbeing, the 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' campaign. This includes signposting staff to trusted resources using different themes each week, with opportunities for staff to ask questions and get involved. We have surveyed staff to ask them how they are doing and have established a Wellbeing and Engagement Partnership Group to support directorate/divisional leads to develop and co-ordinate their response to wellbeing and employee voice.

The employee survey showed that employees feel supported, know where to go for support, are happy with the levels and channels of communication and have been enabled to achieve a good work life balance. However there is always room for improvement and we will continue to engage with staff and identify areas for improvements.

Lessons learnt

As an organisation responsible for leading the response to Covid-19 in Wales we have had to adapt quickly whilst ensuring we are leading by example and providing a safe working environment for our staff. We have increased our communications and engagement and done everything we can to ensure staff feel supported. We have commissioned an independent assessment of our Covid-19 workplace preparedness to learn any lessons.

Having employee wellbeing practices already embedded across our organisation as a result of engagement with the HWW programme gave us a head start and firm grounding to build upon to undertake and respond to the needs of our employees. Having a formalised wellbeing framework in place has enabled us to offer a range of support networks to our staff and to be prepared to best support their needs going forward.



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