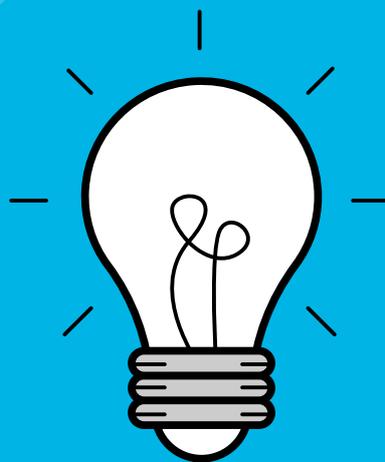




## **Building block 1**

# **Case study: Senior Leadership commitment and engagement**

**A case study from Scottish Government  
Safer Communities Directorate**





Employee mental health and wellbeing is a subject of great interest to us, the Leadership Team in the Safer Communities Directorate in the Scottish Government (SG). Back in 2016, the Co-chair of the SG Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee, as part of our Directorate, was actively communicating the work of the SG Mental Health and Wellbeing Network and we were keen to show our support and get more involved.

Analysis of our absence statistics showed that stress and anxiety were being cited more frequently as the reasons for absence. Anecdotally we were conscious that increasing workloads were also impacting on individuals.

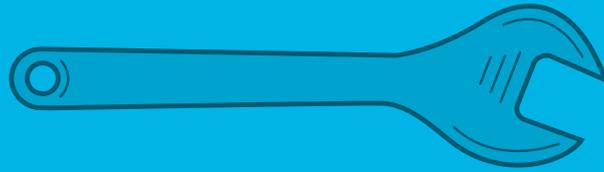
We realised that visible leadership support and role modelling from the top were vital to creating a space where everyone could contribute, participate and bring about positive change. We demonstrated our commitment through investing resources into this work and ensuring that we were consistent in our communications and support.

In 2016 we joined the See Me in Work programme and worked with See Me to anonymously survey the Directorate workforce, to provide us with a baseline on our performance across a range of areas in relation to mental health stigma and discrimination. We received a 70% response rate to the survey, which highlighted a strong level of engagement with the subject from colleagues in the Directorate.

With the help of See Me we established a Directorate Group to plan and implement the Directorate's commitment to tackling mental health stigma and discrimination. We primarily focused on building awareness; reducing stigma; better managing and supporting absence in relation to mental health, and providing a range of learning and development options to employees. Much of the work was taken forward by inspired colleagues across the Directorate in addition to the day job. We invited various people to talk about their personal experience and share what works for them.

Our commitment was recognised and we became an official partner with See Me in 2018. In June 2018 we announced our See Me in Work Partner status at the Senior Civil Servants and Senior Managers Summer event 2018, which was hosted by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee in partnership with the FDA, the trade union representing professionals and managers in public service. The event was well attended and raised the profile of our work across the wider SG. The buy-in and support from senior leaders make this possible and they play an active part in communicating and promoting the actions.

The highlight from the event was hearing from the SG Permanent Secretary, Leslie Evans, sharing her own lived experience. In her regular internet blog, she stressed the importance of good mental health and wellbeing at work:



“ Last week I took part in an open and frank session... reflected on our mental health experiences as individuals, how this informs the culture of our organisation, and where we need to improve mental health and wellbeing support. Like many people I have worked my way through several tough and very stressful episodes. What helped me was the support of my line manager, on one occasion seeing a health professional, and the continuing support of my friends and family. We all have a role to play in stamping out stigma surrounding mental health and improving our workplace culture. ”

More recently we set up a series of dedicated intranet pages to mental health and wellbeing where all Directorate colleagues can access useful articles, videos and signposting to support and advice.

The whole organisation formally supported 'Time to Talk Day' this year and there are regular intranet articles where people share their personal experiences and what helps them. These articles always attract the most comments and highlight the interest people have in tackling mental health stigma and discrimination.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee are now invited to speak to all new starts to the organisation and mental health, and 'wellbeing' forms an integral part of the new line manager development programme.

We are frequently approached by senior leaders across the SG to share our work and approach. We are working collaboratively with the Corporate Human Resources Team to share what has worked for us and provide feedback on organisational approaches. In September this year we were invited to speak at an SG event and share our approach so that other Directorates can learn from us.

We completed the See Me in Work staff survey again a year later and could see some clear improvements in line manager and colleague relations and open conversations, alongside an increase in people feeling safe to disclose. We continue to work collaboratively with colleagues across the Directorate, the wider organisation and See Me to improve how we respond to and support everyone with their mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

**Our take-home message:** Tackling mental health stigma and discrimination is foundational to driving mental health improvement in the workplace. Engage your senior leaders; make the business, legal and moral case to them. Engage them in internal and external communications and help them walk the talk.



### **Contact:**

Visit the See Me website

**<https://www.seemescotland.org/workplace/>**

for other case studies, helpful information and practical resources.

