



# TRANSPORT FOR THE NORTH

## Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing

Internal audit report 4.23/24

FINAL

1 December 2023

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the use of secure portals for the transfer of information, and through electronic communication means, 100 per cent of our audit has been conducted remotely. Based on the information provided by you, we have been able to sample test, or undertake full population testing using data analytics tools, to complete the work in line with the agreed scope.

## Why we completed this audit

This review has been undertaken as part of the approved internal audit plan for 2023/24.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff is a significant component of support that Transport for the North (TfN) provides. TfN has a number of mechanisms to support staff mental health and wellbeing, in order to maximise staff retention levels and reduce staff sickness levels. Included on the staff intranet is a section dedicated to staff mental health and wellbeing, referred to as the "Wellbeing Centre". The Wellbeing Centre offers guidance to members of staff in the following areas:

- Exercise - Staying active is emphasised as helping with mental health as well as physical fitness.
- Food - Resources are provided to emphasise the importance of balanced and nutritional diets.
- Mind - Resources are provided to help with staff mental health.
- Learning - A range of resources are provided to emphasise the importance of learning new concepts for personal development.
- Productivity - Information is provided to help staff with organisation and time management.
- Kids Corner - Resources are provided to support staff with children.

Based on the HR and Skills Operating report the following statistics have been reported:

Month of reporting	Absence (in month)	Absence – Full time year to date (average)	Absence – 12 month rolling (average)
April 2023	1.29 per cent	1.29 per cent	2.61 per cent
August 2023	2.8 per cent	1.95 per cent	2.54 per cent
October 2023	0.55 per cent	1.72 per cent	2.42 per cent

Additionally, TfN offers an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), through an external provider, Axa Health. The EAP offers a range of guidance via the 'Be Supported' programme. Mechanisms are in place for staff to confidentially communicate any issues they may have to the Be Supported team. The guidance offered includes:

- 24/7 calls by the Be Supported team;
- Telephone Counselling Services; and
- Be Supported Portal providing wellbeing videos and other information.

We were advised at the time of our audit that only two referrals has been made during the current financial year, therefore at present no trending or themes reporting has taken place or been necessary.

In addition to the above TfN have a Wellbeing Being Calendar, whereby optional intermediate sessions across the year are available to staff. The sessions include various initiatives which members of may opt to attend.

The purpose of the audit was to review the activities TfN undertakes to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff.

## **Conclusion**

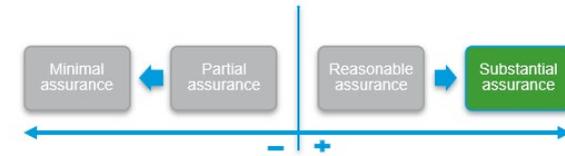
Our review has concluded that TfN has in place a comprehensive framework for the support of members of staff in respect of 'staff mental health and wellbeing'. Staff are effectively supported through the Human Resources and Skills team, qualified mental health first aiders, and referrals to outside agencies are made where required. TfN has recently launched a staff engagement survey, which includes references to mental health and wellbeing, with a view to further enhancing the processes, following on from the feedback from members of staff.

We have however, identified by review of the line manager training spreadsheet, that several staff undertook training during the 2018-19 period. We have, therefore raised a 'low' priority management action in respect of this finding to ensure refresh training is undertaken and takes into account any changes including hybrid working, albeit, we do note that on-going support, guidance and coaching is provided to all line managers in terms of the management of staff well-being and absence management as a result of TfN's business partnering support service provided by TfN's Human Resources and Skills team.

As part of our review, we have also undertaken a benchmarking exercise to identify any good practice displayed across similar organisations within our client base, which TfN management may wish to consider. Please see Appendix A for more information.

## Internal audit opinion:

Taking account of the issues identified, the Board can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.



## Key findings

### We identified the following findings:



TfN has an Absence and Welfare Policy, last reviewed May 2023 by TfN and UNISON (public service union). Our review of the Policy confirmed the inclusion of initiatives available to members of staff in respect of mental health and wellbeing. By review of the external facing website we confirm that the Policy had been published. In addition to the Policy, we confirmed TfN provide numerous guidance documents/ guidance which offers assistance to line managers for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of staff.



Through our review of the 'Effective Management of Sickness Absence Welfare' PowerPoint, we have confirmed that line managers receive relevant training in regard to staff absence. Additionally, by review of the Line Manager Training spreadsheet provided by the HR, Payroll & Skills Business Partner, we confirmed that all staff included on the spreadsheet had undertaken the necessary 'Absence Training'. However, we noted that a number of staff carried out the training in the 2018-19 period. Despite this, no updates have been undertaken in regard to the development of existing line manager training, albeit; we do note that on-going regular support, guidance and coaching is afforded to all managers across TfN in relation to effective absence and welfare management as part of the organisation's HR and Skills Business Partnering Support Service. In the absence of more regular formal refresher training, line managers may not be fully aware of the available options to support staff when dealing with mental health and wellbeing concerns.



Through review of the screenshots TfN provided, we have confirmed that a complete list of all the qualified mental health first aiders are accessible to staff. This is available on the 'Your Mental Health First Aiders' page via SharePoint.



By review of screenshots provided by TfN of the Wellbeing Centre, we have confirmed that mental health and wellbeing guidance is provided in the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which is accessible to all staff via the intranet. The EAP provides a range of guidance through the 'Be Supported' programme, and various mechanisms are in place for staff to communicate wellbeing issues on a confidential basis to the Be Supported team.



We have confirmed that TfN Bulletins (Your TfN) are published on a weekly basis. Additionally, we selected a sample of three Team TfN Bulletins for 28 July, 29 September, and 13 October 2023. For each of the samples, sections relating to staff mental health and wellbeing are included.



We confirmed that a staff survey was carried out in 2019, by which an Action Plan was devised to ensure that the results were addressed by management. By confirmation from the Head of Human Resources and the HR, Payroll & Skills Business Partner, a new staff survey was launched by TfN on 23 October.

Through review of the 13 October Team TfN Bulletin (Your TfN), we have confirmed that staff have been informed about the new staff survey. By confirmation of the Head of Human Resources and the HR, Payroll & Skills Business Partner, an Action Plan will be devised relating to the responses of staff in the survey. Additionally, through review of the 27 October Team TfN Bulletin, staff were reminded of the new staff survey launch, which has the closing date 15 November. Additionally, we were provided with evidence that the new staff survey includes related wellbeing questions,



We obtained a sample of three HR and Skills Operating Reports for April, August, and October 2023, provided to the Operating Board, and by review, we confirmed that details of 'Absence' are included in each of the reports, at a high level.

However, we have observed that other organisations include reasons for absences within their reporting (i.e. top five types of absences, short and long-term sickness figures). This, therefore, provides more context regarding the nature of absences, enabling informed challenges of the data to be undertaken, including emerging trends within the organisation.



Upon review, we confirmed that Operational meetings take place monthly between TfN and UNISON (public service union), attended by the Head of Human Resources, the HR, Payroll and Skills Business Partner, the TfN UNISON Convenor and the Regional Organiser.

We obtained minutes from a selected sample of three TfN/ UNISON Operational Meetings for 14 April, 14 July and 15 September 2023.

Through our review, we have confirmed that each of the Operational Meeting included details of 'Ways of Working/ Relocation Updates' and 'Health, Safety & Wellbeing Updates, including Mental Health Awareness Updates', and hence wellbeing issues are being discussed.



We obtained minutes from the 20 March Employee Forum meeting. Through our review, we have confirmed that the meeting included detailing of the 'Wellbeing Programme', and thus discussions of mental health topics took place.



An external 'Occupational Health Provider'. AXA, is utilised by TfN. At the time of review we were informed that only two referrals had been processed. Therefore, no trends, themes and performance issues have been identified.

## 2. DETAILED FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

This report has been prepared by exception Therefore, we have included in this section, only those areas of weakness in control or examples of lapses in control identified from our testing and not the outcome of all internal audit testing undertaken.

Area: Training of line managers				
<b>Control</b>	TfN do not provide specific training in respect to mental health and wellbeing to line managers, taking into consideration the size and scale of the organisation. Line Managers are required to contact / refer to HR with any identified wellbeing issues. Line managers do however receive absence management training to support the management of absence which incorporates wellbeing.	<b>Assessment:</b>		
		<b>Design</b>	✓	
		<b>Compliance</b>		Partial
<b>Findings / Implications</b>	<p>We obtained a copy of the PowerPoint 'Effective Management of Sickness Absence and Welfare,' which contains training for line managers relating to the mental health and wellbeing of staff. This includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of absence;</li> <li>• Manager's guide to attendance management and wellbeing;</li> <li>• Short and long-term absences;</li> <li>• Welfare meetings; and</li> <li>• Follow up of actions.</li> </ul> <p>From the spreadsheet (Line Manager Training) provided by the HR, Payroll &amp; Skills Business Partner, we confirmed that all members of staff included on the spreadsheet had undertaken the 'Absence Management Training' as required.</p> <p>Review of the training spreadsheet confirm that of the 34 recorded line managers, all 34 had received Absence Training. However, we noted that several staff undertook this training during the 2018-19 period. Additionally, no updates have been undertaken in regard to the development of existing training to line managers. It was however noted; that on-going regular support, guidance and coaching is afforded to all managers across TfN in relation to effective absence and welfare management as part of the organisation's HR and Skills Business Partnering Support Service.</p> <p>In the absence of more regular formal refresher training (for example every three years), line managers may not be fully aware of the current processes when referring members of staff to HR.</p>			
<b>Management Action 1</b>	Management will ensure that all line managers, with the responsibility for supporting/ referring team members to HR in respect of mental health and wellbeing will undertake regular (every three years) up-to-date absence and wellbeing refresher training via on-line e-learning.	<b>Responsible Owner:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Priority:</b>
		Stephen Hipwell, Head of HR	30 April 2024	Low

# APPENDIX A: BENCHMARKING/ BEST PRACTICE

As part of our review we have undertaken a benchmarking exercise utilising our HR subject matter experts to identify any good practice displayed across similar organisations within our client base, which TfN management may wish to consider:

Review of TfN's Absence and Welfare Policy demonstrates good practice terms around absence:

- Terminology is appropriate, e.g. use of "*Absence and Welfare Counselling Interview*" in a formal absence management procedure.
- Guidance is given to managers on how they should communicate with staff while they are on sickness absence.
- Signposts are made to the employee assistance programme.
- Menopause is covered as a dedicated section and the Policy term indicates that menopause symptoms will be treated with the same management care and attention as those with disability or protected characteristics. TfN could consider devising a dedicated menopause policy in order to take proactive action to support the mental health and wellbeing of women with symptoms of menopause.

There is currently no dedicated health and wellbeing policy, which TfN may wish to consider introducing and/or consider in terms of further enhancing it's existing Absence and Welfare Policy. Good practice policy terms would cover:

- How the business will go about managing and preventing stress at work.
- The explicit responsibilities of each line manager; HR; individual employees, and Occupational Health in the management of good mental health and wellbeing.
- How wellbeing and mental health is supported when employees are working from home.
- What measures are in place to ensure any detrimental wellbeing impact from hybrid working is mitigated.
- The support available to staff when they need it.
- How staff should go about raising a serious concern about their health and wellbeing.

Other considerations include:

- A good practice **mental health and wellbeing development plan** would be strategic in nature and include objectives; associated measurement criteria or KPIs; milestones; and forward planning. A successful development plan should include staff involvement, and could include appointing wellbeing champions throughout the organisation to gather feedback, assess how well interventions are being received, and report back to HR or leadership. This would aim to be a proactive, preventative measure.

## APPENDIX B: CATEGORISATION OF FINDINGS

Categorisation of internal audit findings	
Priority	Definition
Low	There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency and quality.
Medium	Timely management attention is necessary. This is an internal control risk management issue that could lead to: Financial losses which could affect the effective function of a department, loss of controls or process being audited or possible reputational damage, negative publicity in local or regional media.
High	Immediate management attention is necessary. This is a serious internal control or risk management issue that may lead to: Substantial losses, violation of corporate strategies, policies or values, reputational damage, negative publicity in national or international media or adverse regulatory impact, such as loss of operating licences or material fines.

The following table highlights the number and categories of management actions made as a result of this audit.

Risk	Control design not effective	Non Compliance with controls	Agreed actions		
			Low	Medium	High
TfN's is unable to recruit and retain suitable staff to deliver the 2023/24 business plan and medium to long term TfN objectives.	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>			<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

# APPENDIX C: SCOPE

The scope below is a copy of the original document issued.

## Scope of the review

The scope was planned to provide assurance on the controls and mitigations in place relating to the following risk.

Objective of the risk under review	Risks relevant to the scope of the review	Risk source
Our review will focus on the activities TfN undertakes to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff. We will review how TfN manages staff that are identified as having mental health and wellbeing concerns including the use of the Employee Assistance Programme. We will also consider training/ awareness activities for staff to recognise indicators in themselves and others.	TfN's is unable to recruit and retain suitable staff to deliver the 2023/24 business plan and medium to long term TfN objectives.	Corporate Risk Register November 2022

### When planning the audit, the following areas for consideration and limitations were agreed:

#### The audit will consider the following;

- A fit for purpose Mental Health and Wellbeing Support & Development Programme is in place relating to staff health and wellbeing support processes and this is adequately supported/resourced ;
- Policies, procedures and supporting processes are in place relating to staff wellbeing support and initiatives;
- Whether training in relation to mental health and wellbeing is made available and delivered to staff, including whether TfN has identified and trained mental health first aiders;
- Line managers have received appropriate training in relation to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their staff;
- Mental health and wellbeing support initiatives that are available to staff and how the available initiatives/support are publicised;
- Mechanisms in place for staff to confidentially highlight issues relating to themselves or others. We will review how TfN manages staff that are identified as having wellbeing concerns including the use of the Employee Assistance Programme;
- How TfN uses the results of the staff engagement survey to inform its initiatives around mental health and wellbeing;
- We will also review how TfN uses sickness absence data to enable management to have an understanding of patterns, themes and trends and sharing of any lessons learnt;

- Governance and reporting of staff mental health, wellbeing, and sickness absence related matters. This will include consideration of the data provided to TfN by the external Occupational Health provider and how this is used internally in terms of trends, themes, and the performance of the external provider; and
- As part of our review we will undertake a benchmarking exercise to identify any good practice displayed across similar organisations within our client base, which TfN management may wish to consider. Furthermore we will utilise our subject matter experts to input into TfN's processes.

**Limitations to the scope of the audit assignment:**

- We will undertake an assessment of the adequacy of selected aspects of the control framework and we will perform limited testing to confirm its operation in practice;
- We will not provide assurance that policies are complete and cover all legal and statutory aspects of mental health support;
- We will not consider Trade Union involvement, and return to work processes;
- We will not comment on the appropriateness of any element of the mental health services at / or provided by TfN;
- We will not undertake detailed testing on any mental health or wellbeing referrals;
- We will not provide assurance that staff will raise issues, only that necessary information is provided by TfN for them;
- We will not engage with individual members of staff as part of our review;
- We will not provide an opinion on the quality or effectiveness of any of the support services in place;
- Our work does not negate, or replace, the need for legal advice;
- Where relevant to the area under review, we have established whether policies and procedures are in place, but we have not verified whether these are fit for purpose;
- We will not review individual, confidential matters or staff records data as part of this audit;
- We will not provide assurance regarding the effectiveness of external agencies / third party providers of support;
- We will not confirm that the sickness and absence or leave policies and procedures are complete and legal;
- We will not provide assurance over whether all sickness taken is valid, or that suitable processes are being undertaken within occupational health;
- We will not confirm that all sickness absences are recorded; and
- IT related controls are outside the scope of this audit.

Our work does not provide assurance that material error, loss or fraud do not exist.

**Debrief held** 13 November 2023  
**Draft report issued** 27 November 2023  
**Responses received** 30 November 2023  
**Final report issued** 1 December 2023

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We thank you again for working with us.

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