

CASE STUDY

RHA WALES: ENABLING EMPLOYEES TO CO-CREATE THEIR OWN 'GOOD JOBS'

RHA Wales is a registered social landlord, owning over 1,800 homes across Rhondda Cynon Taff. It employs around 80 people who deliver high quality services and support to its tenants. Its holistic approach to work, health and wellbeing has created a supportive working environment and resulted in excellent employee engagement.

Introduction

RHA introduced a new People strategy at the end of 2019. The strategy aimed to ensure that RHA was considered to be a great place to work, placing the highest priority on health and wellbeing, and providing a working environment that helped to maximise the potential of its people. RHA also wanted to engage with its people in creative ways and provide regular opportunities for them to offer feedback on what was important.

Engagement with teams began in early 2020, identifying core themes and areas of focus which would improve the workplace and offering. These included a review of flexible working options, health and benefits, and further investment in wellbeing and mental health support.

What RHA did

The pandemic resulted in the majority of people transferring to homeworking during March 2020, and in early June, colleagues were surveyed to understand how they were being impacted by the changes and to gauge views on homeworking.

Overwhelmingly, feedback highlighted the benefits of homeworking, with shorter commutes, more time

to spend with family and increased productivity. Whilst people missed colleagues and personal interactions, the hybrid working model of shared home and office working was one the majority aspired to for the future.

As a result, following extensive staff consultation, RHA introduced a new flexible and homeworking policy in October 2020. It recognised the importance of supporting wellbeing and work-life balance by introducing a nine-day fortnight working pattern for all. This was complemented by improved healthcare and benefits which provided 24/7 access to mental health support, employee assistance through a dedicated employee assistance programme (EAP), and an enhanced offering of medical insurance cover.

During the consultation period, the Executive team met with every individual in the organisation to present the changes and gather feedback. A launch video was produced along with an e-flyer and a series of frequently asked questions (FAQs) to communicate proposals.

A culture of trust enables colleagues to fulfil their roles and offer the best services to tenants whilst



retaining a valuable work-life balance and dedicated time for wellbeing. RHA's CEO and Executive Team continue to emphasise the importance of wellbeing, flexible working and work-life balance at staff meetings, via vlogs and using dedicated Microsoft Teams channels for connection, wellbeing and social activities. There is a continued commitment to promote attendance at coffee mornings, brunch and babble sessions, to take regular breaks, and support colleagues with caring responsibilities.

Impact

RHA already had a strong track record of employee engagement and recent changes have served to further improve performance and increase engagement during a challenging period. The quarterly RHA Pulse employee satisfaction surveys are clear evidence of this, consistently delivering rates of 96% and above over the last 12 months.

Sickness absence is at historic lows despite the pandemic, and below sector benchmarks. RHA's people are utilising health insurance, mental health support and the EAP, including the services of its in-house mental health first aiders, to provide immediate support, reduced waiting times and improved access to medical care.

With renewed focus on health and wellbeing, an in-house volunteer-led group – Hapus – re-launched during the pandemic, ensuring regular support and

wellbeing activities were available. Hapus focuses on the key areas of equality and diversity, wellbeing, and mental health. It hosts regular virtual coffee mornings, brunch and babble sessions and learning events, encouraging people to come together and talk about the challenges they face. The open and honest culture and commitment to talking about mental health means recent events have seen a rise in attendance and Hapus is seen as a useful forum to share experiences.

RHA is committed to continue delivering on its ambition to be a great place to work. Feedback from its people is clear; they are eager to have the opportunity to meet face-to-face and interact with colleagues, but the benefits of the previous 12 months of home-working have been harnessed in the organisation's new working offer, and this will continue to be built upon for the future.

Call to action

Periods of uncertainty and crises sometimes mean that there is reluctance to make change or act too quickly and maintain the status quo until things settle down. RHA did not want to miss an opportunity to harness the positive outcomes its people had experienced from home working and ensure it maintained this and improved how it worked going forward. Being bold with a firm and positive focus on the future and having the confidence to listen to its people and make changes during a time of uncertainty has reaped rewards for RHA.

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