



Making Ends Meet

Employer: Tyne Housing Association

Area: Newcastle and North Tyneside

Theme: Financial Wellbeing



Background

Tyne Housing Association has been involved in the Better Health at Work programme since 2018, gradually working up to achieve Continuing Excellence in 2022 and currently working towards Maintaining Excellence.

Award activities have always had strong involvement from staff and the programme is delivered through a small working group of staff volunteers from across the organisation, including champions from the Corporate and Senior Management teams. A small annual budget supports Tyne's BHAW initiatives. Early in the BHAW journey, the emphasis was on campaigns and engagement from our teams, but as work on the award has progressed, there is a much stronger focus on organisational, strategic approaches that make structural changes benefiting the whole workforce, supported by policies and procedures.

During 2022 cost of living became a substantial concern as prices increased and our staff, many of which are front line workers who are not highly paid, felt the squeeze. We talked sensitively with our teams and all staff were invited to complete an internal confidential survey in September 2022 to share concerns around cost of living.

As a result, immediate measures were implemented to provide support, including one off cost of living payments in October, an increase to mileage rates, early adoption of the revised real living wage rate, implementation of travel season ticket loan schemes and regular articles and links to support with cost of living (e.g. budget clinics, toolkits, etc). Our employee assistance programme



includes access to free legal, financial and debt advice. All these measures benefit all staff across the whole organisation, including Ouseburn Farm, Tyne's charitable subsidiary.

"I was pleased that Tyne was interested in understanding some of the personal pressures people are under. The cost of living payment was really welcome' Staff member"

We built on this work in 2023, starting with a repeat of the cost of living payment of £250 in January - a time when we knew everyone would be feeling the pinch after Christmas and with higher winter fuel bills.

In March 2023, we ran an independent staff consultation, working in partnership with Society Matters, who provided and ran the survey. Society Matters attended a Corporate Management Team meeting to provide detailed feedback and a suggested action plan.

About a third of our workforce participated in the survey. Headline results were:

- less than 10% of respondents said they were managing comfortably on existing income. 24% said there is a gap. Over 75% said their financial situation has got worse within the last 12 months
- 67% said they take part in leisure activities less than they would like and 24% said they can't afford to take part in leisure activities at all. 42% said they were struggling to pay household bills.

Feedback from Society Matters was that Tyne already had a substantial amount of support in place (thanks to the work carried out in the previous year); in fact our approach to supporting staff with cost of living was used by them as a case study to support other workplaces on making improvements (see quote below). However additional initiatives were introduced, which included:

- Improved promotion of season ticket loans and reintroduction of the cycle to work scheme
- Provision of access to information on benefits and money advice. Staff are given paid time off to attend pension review meetings
- Agreement to make an additional Christmas payment of £100 to every employee in December 2023

This is in addition to existing interventions such as Living Wage early adoption, provision of free fruit,



free social and enrichment events, and the ability to request salary advance.

Since the survey and initial feedback session, cost of living and staff support remains a live topic at corporate level and we have introduced new measures that include:

- Tyne recently signed up to Wagestream, allowing staff to manage their salary and draw down advances to cover unexpected bills. Use of Wagestream removes the need to discuss advances with the employer and thus reduces stigma for staff
- We have recently started rolling out the Mid-life MOT initiative, which offers our staff members aged 50+ a chance to receive tailored advice and support around financial planning
- Tyne has joined a corporate discount scheme for Decathlon, enabling our teams to benefit from savings on clothing and sports equipment

Cost of living remains an ongoing issue at Tyne and is discussed regularly at CMT and Board meetings, with commitment to provide additional benefits wherever feasible. We expect it to continue to feature in our ongoing Better Health at Work activities

"I'd like to invite you to talk on the podcast for half an hour or so about some of the measures you've taken at Tyne as we heard a lot of examples of good practice that we'd be keen to share..." Society Matters, summary review of Tyne's 'Making Ends Meet' survey"

"I moved teams with an increase in salary, but if it wasn't for that I would be really struggling." Making Ends Meet survey respondent"

"I'm looking forward to doing the mid life MOT because my personal circumstances have changed and I need to think more about money for retirement now' Staff member"

"xxx"

