Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce
Mental Wellbeing Charter

Following the Windsor Debates event in September 2019 - 'Strengthening the workforce in the Thames Valley – Mental health, diversity and inclusion in the workplace', TVCC included a new focus on mental wellbeing within the five main priorities of its Business Manifesto (2020) and committed to setting up a Mental Wellbeing Charter in 2020.

"It was a privilege to speak at the Chamber's recent 27th Windsor Debates, an awakening for the Chamber, I commended their leadership for providing an opportunity to showcase great work and initiatives taking place and its commitment to help make a difference and champion this cause in 2020."

Rt Hon Theresa May MP

In 2020, to support the development of the Charter and creation of a Mental Health Community in the Thames Valley, we have been virtually bringing together a group of mental wellbeing advocates and organisations throughout the region to learn from one another and discuss the challenges and ways to continue to provide a responsive and effective mental wellbeing strategy.

There has been welcome focus and attention on reducing the stigma relating to mental illness in recent years; legislation to ensure mental health is given the same priority as physical health (parity of esteem), Theresa May prioritising it when Prime Minister, and also Royal Foundation campaigning and high profile figures sharing their personal stories of mental illness, and subsequent hope and recovery.

There has also been increased evidence of the socio-economic fallout as a result of mental ill health, and the increased productivity realised from people having good mental health as well as physical health.

Employers and society have responded well to this, adopting such campaigns as 'Time to Change', being a 'Mindful Employer' and by having mental health first aiders throughout an organisation as well as providing responsive mental health support if and when needed.

We are, however, now in ever more challenging times. Ways of working and how we live our lives are completely different to what they were some months ago. Relationships, for many, have changed beyond recognition.

In England, the subsequent mental health challenge has been estimated, up to 10 million people (almost 20% of the population), who will need either new or additional mental health support as a direct consequence of the crisis. 1.5 million of those will be children and young people under 18[1]

It is also predicted that some groups are more at risk of experiencing mental ill health than others. This includes people with existing mental health conditions, NHS workers, people who have been in Intensive Therapy Units (ITU) and their families, those who have been bereaved and those affected by unemployment. The figure is expected to rise when the extent of the unequal effects of the pandemic on Black and minority ethnic communities, on care home residents and people with disabilities becomes clearer.

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[1] Centre for Mental Health, October 2020 https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/news/10-million-people-england-may-need-support-their-mental-health-result-pandemic-says-centre-mental-health

One of the greatest challenges we currently face is living with the uncertainty of what will happen in the immediate and long-term future. We encourage employers to learn from other organisations as well as share good practice and how they have adapted their support to meet the needs of their employees. Subsequently, we have written a Mental Health Charter to help guide companies, regardless of size or stature, to enable their employees and organisation thrive and be productive.

The Chamber invites organisations to sign up to this Charter and pledge their commitment to building a positive mental wellbeing culture, which in turn tackles stigma and builds trust, ensuring that the right help is available to anyone seeking mental health support, wherever they are and whenever they need it.

The commitments:

— We commit to providing an environment for our employees to thrive in and encourage those who may be struggling to speak up and seek help.

— Through effective people management and training we foster trust amongst our employees, supervisors and leaders, to help create a workspace where employees feel comfortable to self-identify as a person with a mental illness.

— We understand that culture and leadership are pivotal to creating a healthy and thriving workplace.

— Our leaders are open about mental health and mental illness (be that through personal stories, or education)

— We will treat those experiencing mental illness as we would with someone experiencing a physical illness in terms of support, time off, and a supportive return to work.

— We will be honest and support people to live with ambiguity and uncertainty.

— We will actively risk assess those who are most at risk of developing or have an existing mental health condition.

— We will support our employees as parents and carers to enable their children to be well during this time.

— We will be a learning organisation – establishing learning relationships with other organisations and sharing what we have learned.