**ADDITIONAL LEAVE PROPOSAL: WELLBEING DAYS**

Prepared by: JRG Date: 15/09/20 Agenda no: 6c

**Purpose of the paper**

Decision

**Background and context**

Covid 19 has brought unanticipated challenges for HM and the team has shown creativity and commitment throughout to ensure that services have been able to continue. This proposal is to recognise and reward the team's efforts through improved terms, including a pay increase (outlined in accompanying proposal) and this proposal for additional, discretionary leave to support staff wellbeing.

**Where are we now?**

We have fairly standard annual leave entitlement: 33 days annual leave, including 8 statutory holidays (bank holidays); as the majority of staff are part-time, this is awarded on a pro-rata basis.

Staff leaving the organisation by resignation or termination have untaken accrued leave paid in final salary, calculated pro-rata.

**What are the key issues?**

Staff wellbeing is a paramount concern: the team has had to deal with lockdown on a personal level as well as continuing to offer support services at a time of increased demand. That this has been maintained whilst working from home adds another dimension – mutual support and debrief is not as readily available as being bodily present with colleagues.

We have a duty as employers to ensure that staff have the opportunity to take annual leave for rest and relaxation. Impact of lockdown on accrued annual leave was raised in a previous paper.

Staff who may need some 'downtime' to process or recharge from emotionally-taxing work currently have to choose whether to use annual leave or sick leave to do so. Using annual leave as a direct response to stress is not its intended use. Recording sickness absence has potential consequences for salaries and career prospects, and someone who needs a breather from dealing with distressed service users is not "sick" but appropriately managing their own wellbeing.

Given Healthy Minds' purpose, we should be leading the way on managing staff wellbeing in employment practices, and recognising and responding to the emotional burden that is absorbed by the team.

The proposal is to introduce more flexibility in leave entitlement:

Additional to current leave entitlement, a maximum of five "wellbeing days" per employee per annum. These are agreed at line managers' discretion and taken at short notice.

- They do not affect employees' annual leave entitlement or sickness absence record.
- They are not a contractual entitlement: employees may not carry forward wellbeing days and they are not accrued leave to be paid if someone leaves employment.
- Staff are expected to use wellbeing days responsibly: work commitments are to be met and impact on colleagues will be a consideration in agreeing wellbeing days. It is not acceptable to take a wellbeing day if colleagues are expected to cover pre-arranged meetings, for example.
- They are not a substitute for sickness absence: an employee who is ill must take sick leave.
- They are not for extended annual leave if someone fancies an extra day off.
- We are in the process of setting up a new leave recording system on which wellbeing days will be monitored to identify use / abuse.
- If approved, leave policies will be updated along with guidance for staff and managers.

**What is asked of trustees?**

To consider the organisation as a leader on promoting staff wellbeing, among which this proposal would clearly signal that intention, and approve additional leave on the basis described.

**Finance**

There is a notional cost in that this represents staff time in days off. 7.5 hours (1 day) project worker time equates to £116 inclusive of on-costs. As wellbeing days will not require backfill or additional cover, there is no extra cost to the organisation and staff time is within service budgets already.

**Recommendation**

The Board is asked to approve this proposal, with a suggested implementation date of 1st October 2020.