Purpose of report
This report updates the Sub-Committee on the use of the counselling service.

1.0 Background

1.1 ENC has provided staff with the opportunity to access a counsellor for up to 6 one hour sessions free of charge for at least 7 years. Staff may contact the counsellor for any reason, whether that is a work or home issue, or a mixture of both. The names and details of who has accessed the service, or their reasons, are not shared with ENC. Support can be offered quickly, often within a few days, which can help staff remain in work where counselling on the NHS may have a waiting list of many months.

1.2 Counselling is one part of a broader range of interventions, both formal and informal, that ENC offers staff to support their wellbeing (both physical and mental) including:

- Flexible working, including compressed hours (to enable, for example, 4-day weeks and 9-day fortnights)
- Wellbeing meetings with managers on return from sick leave.
- Extended wellbeing meetings with managers and HR when a trigger has been met (3 absences in 6 months, 5 absences in 12 months or a month in one go).
- Occupational health referrals.
- Informal support from colleagues and managers.
- Reasonable adjustments to support disability and other issues such as family illness (including working from home, reduced hours, phased returns to work, lamps, standing desks).

2.0 Counselling service usage

2.1 The figures below show that the trend has been towards fewer staff using the counselling service in recent years. Why exactly is unclear; however, the availability of the service has recently been re-advertised on ENCHub to ensure that staff are aware that they can contact the service. All HR letters that are potentially distressing (such as dismissal, redundancy and invitations to absence hearings) include details of the counselling service. Managers have also highlighted the availability of the service to staff as part of informal support sessions.
2.2 The current provider of counselling is ceasing to trade due to retirement at the end of 2017, therefore HR will be involved in finding a replacement provider. One option would be to provide an alternative counsellor in the short term (so there is no cessation of the service) but also to consider a broader employee support product in the longer term (which would include face to face counselling, but could also include telephone counselling).

3.0 Financial implications

3.1 Since 1 October 2014 the cost of counselling at ENC has been £8,690. Each session costs £55. In 15/16 the total cost was £4,510. In 16/17 the total cost was £1,925.

4.0 Legal implications

4.1 Offering a counselling service shows evidence of ENC maintaining a supportive working environment.

5.0 Risk implications

5.1 Offering counselling to staff helps to reduce the risk of increased staff absence due to sickness.

6.0 Equality implications

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7.0 Constitutional Implications

7.1 There are no constitutional implications arising from this report.

8.0 Customer Service Implications

8.1 Providing a counselling service to help staff manage stress helps to reduce absence and therefore maintain service levels to our customers.

9.0 Corporate Outcomes

9.1 The Corporate Outcome to which this policy contributes is Effective Management.
10.0 Recommendations

10.1 The Sub-Committee is asked to note the content of this policy.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal</th>
<th>Power: Local Government Act 1972</th>
<th>Other considerations:</th>
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Background Papers: None

Person Originating Report: Aime Armstrong – HR Manager

Date: 30 August 2017

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(Committee Report Normal Rev. 22)