

**SCOTTISH  
PUBLIC  
SERVICES  
OMBUDSMAN**



**INDEPENDENT  
NATIONAL  
WHISTLEBLOWING  
OFFICER**



People Centred | Improvement Focused

# **SPSO Wellbeing Strategy**

## **2025-2028**





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## 1. SPSO Leadership Team Foreword

1.1 The Leadership Team is delighted to support the SPSO Wellbeing Strategy 2025-28. It underlines our commitment to fostering a healthy environment in which each staff member feels supported, resilient and able to work to the best of their ability.

1.2 The Leadership Team recognises that individual and collective well-being is fundamental to the successful achievement of outcomes. This strategy, which supports our values, provides a framework for cultivating a work culture and environment where everyone feels valued and supported to give their best.



1.3 We believe that by prioritising employee well-being, we are investing in a stronger, more resilient and successful workforce, which will ultimately enable improved outcomes for our customers and stakeholders.

## 2. What is workplace wellbeing and why is it important?

2.1 Workplace wellbeing means different things to different people at different times but is defined by the [International Labour Organization](#) as relating to 'all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organisation'.



- 2.2 On average, we spend a third of our life at work, therefore a healthy workplace can play a big part in our overall health and wellbeing. As well as supporting the individual, investing in employee wellbeing benefits the organisation by helping each staff member reach their potential. This can lead to better employee engagement, reduced sickness absence and improved performance.



### 3. Why have a wellbeing strategy?

- 3.1 As a people-focused organisation, we are committed to taking extra steps over and above our legal duties to foster a healthy environment in which each staff member can flourish. This will contribute towards building a happy and healthy workforce, which, in turn, will help us achieve our strategic aims.
- 3.2 According to the [CIPD](#), investing in employee wellbeing offers a number of benefits. However, wellbeing initiatives often fail to reach their potential because they stand alone, isolated from the everyday business. To gain real benefit, employee wellbeing priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation, embedded in its culture, leadership and people management. For this reason, we have developed this wellbeing strategy to:
- Provide a clear wellbeing vision that is endorsed by the Leadership Team
  - Set out the actions we need to take to achieve this vision
  - Help support a culture that supports and invests holistically in the health and wellbeing of our staff
  - Clarify how we will measure our progress towards achieving our vision



## 4. Our wellbeing vision

- 4.1 To foster a healthy environment in which each staff member feels supported, resilient and able to work to the best of their ability.

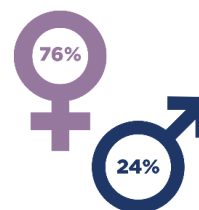


## 5. What our employee data shows (2023-24)

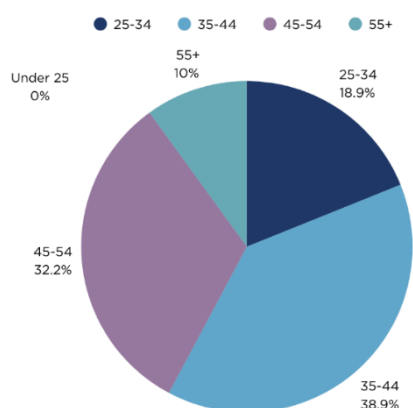
- 5.1 To meet the wellbeing needs of our staff and ensure that initiatives are relevant and valued, it is important that we consider the characteristics of our workforce.

- 5.2 Staff demographics as of 31 March 2024:

- A greater proportion of our workforce are female (76%) compared with male (24%).



**SPSO Workforce Age range**    % of staff

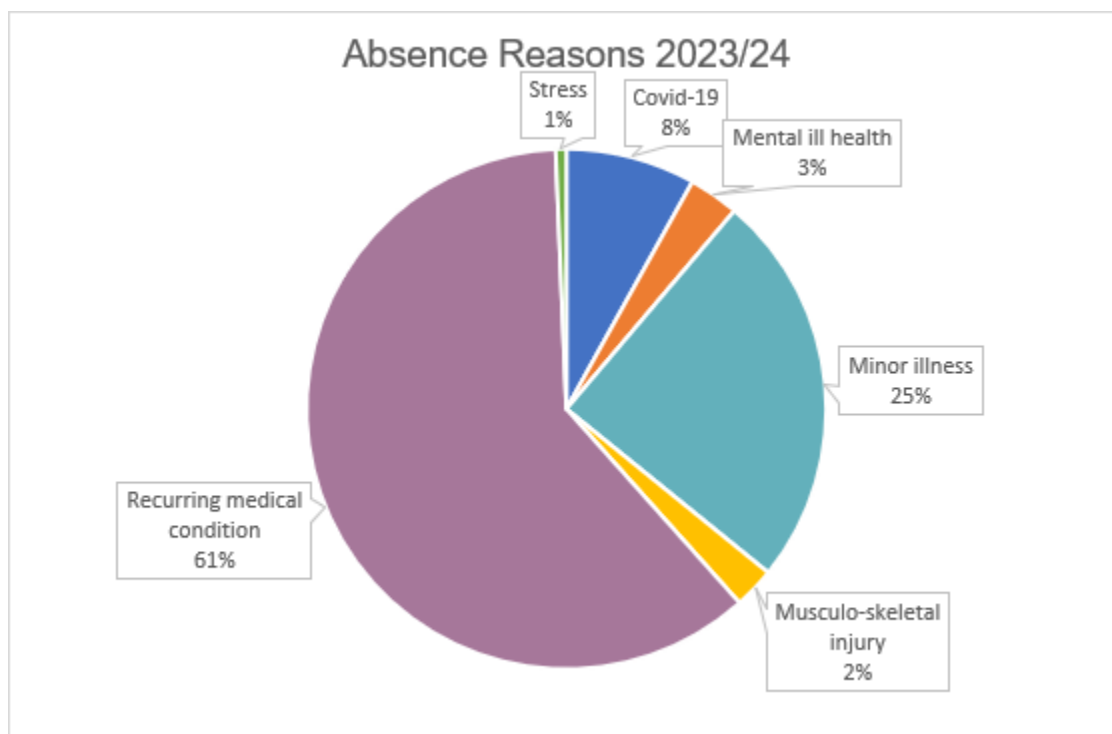


- 66% of our employees work full time, with the remainder (34%) working part-time.
- 93% of part-time workers are female and 7% are male
- 41% of female staff work part-time compared with 11% of male staff
- The most common age ranges for our employees are 35-44 (39% of staff) and 45-54 (31% of staff). A lesser proportion (19%) of employees are aged between 25 and 34. There are no employees in the 'under 25' age range and 10% of employees in the 'over 55' age group.

2023-24	Headcount		Full Time		Part Time		FTE
Male	21	23%	19	31%	2	7%	63.31
Female	69	77%	43	69%	26	93%	20.77
Total	90	100%	62	100%	28	100%	84.08



- 5.3 Staff turnover: during 2023-24, the turnover rate was 11%. This was slightly higher than 2022-23, when it was 8%, due to a number of temporary contracts ending.
- 5.4 Staff absence: the average number of days absence per person in 2023/24 was 6.7 days (including long term absence). Excluding long term absence this equated to 2.6 days per person. This is below the average reported for public sector employees by the CIPD<sup>1</sup> (10.6 days including long term absence).
- 39% of absences reported were short term and 61% were long term.
  - Recurring medical conditions were the most common reason for absence (61%). Minor illnesses were the next highest cause of absence (25%).



<sup>1</sup> [UK Sick Leave & Absence Rate on Increase | 2023 Data | CIPP](#)



## 5.5 Wellbeing results from our staff survey 2023-24:

- The majority of staff (75%+) responded positively when asked about their mental, physical, financial and social wellbeing.
- 5% reported poor mental health, with 12% rating this as fair
- 10% reported that their physical health was poor and 15% reported that it was fair
- 7% reported that their financial wellbeing was poor and 13% reported that it was fair
- 5% of staff reported that their social wellbeing was fair and 10% reported that it was poor.

	Mental health	Physical health	Financial wellbeing	Social wellbeing
Responded positively	83%	75%	80%	85%
Rated as fair	12%	15%	14%	5%
Rated as poor	5%	10%	7%	10%

## 5.6 In the last 12 months, people have reported experiencing:

	Musculoskeletal problems	Work-related stress	Worked Despite not feeling well enough
Yes	29%	40%	50%
No	71%	60%	50%

## 5.7 The majority of people (90%+) agreed with the following statements around the promotion and culture of wellbeing, support for wellbeing and awareness of initiatives.

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22
Health and wellbeing is effectively promoted	95%	93%	87%
Health and wellbeing is part of our culture	90%	95%	83%
The SPSO is committed to supporting my health and wellbeing	90%	93%	77%
People help and support each other at SPSO	92%	93%	90%
I am supported in my health and wellbeing	86%	86%	79%
I am aware of health and wellbeing initiatives available to me	93%	95%	83%



5.8 The most popular initiatives for health and wellbeing were related to flexi-time (98%) and the Healthy Living Allowance (58%), while flexible working was found useful by 51% of staff. Compared with the previous year, less staff reported that they found the Employee Assistance Programme, the wellbeing page on the intranet or the Cycle to work scheme useful.

- Flexi-time policy (98%)
- Flexible working arrangements (51%)
- Health Living Allowance (58%)
- Information, resources and emails (23%)
- Employee assistance programme (12%)
- Wellbeing page on the intranet (7%)
- Cycle to work scheme (8%)
- A number of 'other' responses related to hybrid working and manager support.

5.9 Health and Wellbeing suggestions from our staff survey 2023-24:

- More in person / team building events and activities
- Extension to the Healthy Living Allowance
- Improve physical environment/ergonomics
- Four day working week
- Access to fresh fruit
- More development/support.



5.10 What we are already doing:

- Initiatives to support wellbeing via our action plan and calendar of initiatives such as Mental Health Awareness Week 2024 and Back Care Awareness Week
- DSE assessments and equipment provided to support individual needs for home and office working





- Policies that promote a healthy working environment such as absence, no-smoking, alcohol and substance abuse, health and safety and working with display screen equipment
- Targeted initiatives and policies that are representative of our staff group such as the Menopause and Periods Policy
- Policies that support positive physical and mental health such as flexible working and leave
- Terms and conditions that support staff with their financial wellbeing, including pay policy, travel loans, meeting the standards of a Living Wage employer, Civil Service Pension Scheme arrangements and Life Assurance
- Employee Assistance Programme
- Occupational health self-referral
- Healthy Living Allowance
- Cycle to work scheme and secure bike parking at the office
- Office facilities that support wellbeing, such as welfare room, kitchen, shower facilities.

## **6. Summary of priorities based on demographics and staff survey results**

- 6.1 Our staff survey and demographic data demonstrate strong wellbeing performance as an organisation. Our main focus will be on maintaining this performance and building on areas that have been identified for development.
- 6.2 Our analysis suggests the following areas as wellbeing priorities:
- Staff in age groups 35-44 and 45-54, with particular focus on wellbeing initiatives aimed at common, recurring and age-related medical conditions.
  - Initiatives supporting the wellbeing of female staff and those with caring responsibilities
  - Staff working despite not feeling well enough



- Given the nature of our work and being largely desk-based, initiatives aimed at supporting musculoskeletal and stress issues
  - Improving perception of how we communicate the work of the Wellbeing Action Group (poor view of intranet or replacement intranet)
  - Reviewing the effectiveness and perception of the EAP
- 6.3 We are committed to promoting actions and behaviours that holistically support positive wellbeing while at the same time, recognising that health and wellbeing needs are unique to the individual and their circumstances. We therefore recognise that what supports one person's wellbeing may not be helpful for all, and that different forms of support are needed. It is generally accepted, however, that there are a number of fundamental elements to positive wellbeing.
- 6.4 With this in mind, we have focused our priorities on four key areas which we see as being fundamental to personal and organisational wellbeing:



## **Positive Culture**



**Healthy Body**

**Healthy Mind**



## **Feeling Connected**



We have set out how we will seek to achieve and measure these aims below.



## 7. Healthy mind

7.1 We all need good mental health and wellbeing – it's essential to living happy and healthy lives<sup>2</sup>. Our 2023-24 staff survey results showed that 83% responded positively when asked about their mental health. While we have a number of measures in place to support staff wellbeing, the enduring and sometimes upsetting nature of our casework can mean that staff who work in casework are at risk of burnout and/or vicarious trauma. Similarly, there can be risks associated with work that can affect the mental wellbeing of *all* staff. Taking the above information into account, we want to ensure that we are doing as much as we can to mitigate these risks, and to support positive mental health.

7.2 What we are already doing (new and ongoing)

- Policies that support general wellbeing e.g. flexi-time, managing work-related stress policy
- Supportive culture – regular 121s with managers and team check-ins
- Trained managers on mental health first aid
- Relaunched/ rebranded Mental Health First Aiders to Health and Wellbeing Peer Supporters.



7.3 New and proposed initiatives

- Ensuring mental health and wellbeing resources (e.g. intranet page and EAP) as well as details of the Wellbeing Action Group form part of new staff inductions and 121s where appropriate
- Once intranet replacement is introduced, create wellbeing content
- Running mental health initiatives including Mental Awareness Week
- Ensuring that we continue to have a culture of talking openly about mental health in the workplace
- Review effectiveness and uptake of mental health first aiders

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<sup>2</sup> [Top tips to improve mental wellbeing - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/)



#### 7.4 How we will know it is successful

- Data analysis of absences linked to mental health
- Monitoring feedback from staff surveys (including EAP, mental health initiatives etc)
- If mental health is discussed openly and regularly
- Uptake of initiatives.

## 8. Healthy body

8.1 [Being physically active](#) reduces the risk of major illness and stress, as well as offering a range of additional health benefits including boosting self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy. All of the above, can contribute to performance and wellbeing at work. However, according to [GOV.UK](#),<sup>3</sup> around 34% of men and 42% percent of women are not active enough for good health (October 2021).

8.2 There are a number of steps employers can take to support people with physical wellbeing. Taking the above information into account, we want to ensure that we are doing as much as we can to meet our health and safety obligations, encourage movement and reduce the risks associated with low physical activity.

8.3 What we are already doing (new and ongoing)

- Health and safety practices e.g. DSE assessments
- Flexible working and HR policies that support physical wellbeing and encourage movement e.g walking meetings, Cycle to Work Scheme etc
- Wellbeing initiatives e.g. step count challenges
- Healthy Living Allowance



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<sup>3</sup> [Physical activity: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK](#)



#### 8.4 New and proposed initiatives

- Coordinating the work of our collaboratives to ensure that physical activity is incorporated into our planned initiatives and planned appropriately
- Review and promotion of Healthy Living Allowance
- Promotion of existing policies e.g. walking meetings guidance

#### 8.5 How we will know it is successful

- Staff surveys
- Uptake of healthy living allowance and other initiatives
- Staff awareness of the range of support and policies available to support a healthy body.

### 9. Feeling connected

9.1 In the workplace, feeling connected and [social wellbeing](#)<sup>4</sup> generally refers to the extent to which an employee feels a sense of belonging at work. From relationships with colleagues, to alignment with organisational values, social wellbeing is about feeling valued as a person, colleague and employee.



9.2 We are now a hybrid working organisation. This brings many benefits including reduced commuting time, improved work-life balance and greater flexibility about where we live. However, we recognise that it also brings challenges in terms of how connected we feel with colleagues. We are also aware that staff have different wants and needs in terms of feeling connected. This can be influenced by a range of factors including career stage, family commitments and job role. Our aim is to ensure that supporting connectedness for all staff is a priority for the organisation.

9.3 What we are already doing

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<sup>4</sup> [Why “social wellbeing” is more than just a buzzword | theHRD](#)



- Employee engagement channels e.g. LT update and All staff events
- Regular team meetings, 121s, informal discussions etc
- Having some fun in the workplace such as MS Teams social groups, nights out etc
- Policies that encourage feeling connected within communities such as reviewing or promoting our policy on volunteering
- Strengthening teamwork through the work of our collaboratives (charities/ IDEA/ Wellbeing etc) and ensuring that these activities are joined-up wherever possible.

#### 9.4 New and proposed initiatives

- Once an intranet replacement is available, ensure this is a forum for connecting with others
- Building on the success of wellbeing initiatives by organising more regular opportunities to connect e.g. a monthly lunchtime walk/ run.

#### 9.5 How we will know it is successful

- Uptake of employee initiatives
- Employee survey results



## 10. Positive culture

- 10.1 According to the [CIPD<sup>5</sup>](#), a positive organisational culture allows employees to understand their organisation and feel that their voice matters in driving the business towards a common purpose. Our staff survey results from 2023-24 show that 90% of responders considered that health and wellbeing is part of our culture (this was slight reduction from the previous year's results of 95%). To help maintain a positive culture, we will actively seek views on what matters to our people, act on these views and report back

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<sup>5</sup> [Organisational culture | CIPD](#)



what has happened. We will also live our values and embed wellbeing in everything we do from strategic planning to day-to-day activities.

#### 10.2 What we are already doing

- Build a caring and compassionate culture where people feel able to raise concerns, and feel heard in a supportive environment
- Ensure our behaviours model our values
- Support a healthy work-life balance
- Ensure that our policies support a healthy working environment free from harassment, abuse and bullying.

#### 10.3 New and proposed initiatives

- Continue to explore the best ways to engage and communicate with our staff as our experience of hybrid working grows
- Embed wellbeing culture and ensure all staff are aware of it
- Embedding our new Whistleblowing procedure.

#### 10.4 How we will know it is successful

- Employee survey results
- Monitoring of turnover/ retention
- Learning outcomes of any whistleblowing concerns that are raised





## 11. Strategy timeline

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Priorities</b>	Embed the strategy	Review year 1	Take stock and prepare for next steps
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Maintain existing activities/ initiatives.</p> <p>Introduce the following new initiatives:</p> <p><b>Healthy Mind</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring mental health and wellbeing resources (e.g. consider development of a new intranet page and EAP) as well as details of the Wellbeing Action Group form part of new staff inductions and 121s where appropriate</li> <li>Once intranet replacement is introduced, develop wellbeing content</li> <li>Running mental health initiatives including during Mental Awareness Week</li> <li>Ensuring that we continue to have a culture of talking openly about mental health in the workplace</li> </ul> <p><b>Healthy Body</b></p>	Consider new initiatives taking into account previous year's results.	Consider new initiatives taking into account previous year's results. Gather staff views on existing strategy to inform next strategy.





	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinating the work of our collaboratives to ensure that physical activity is incorporated into our planned initiatives and planned appropriately</li> <li>Review and promotion of Healthy Living Allowance</li> <li>Promotion of existing policies e.g. walking meetings guidance</li> </ul> <p><b>Feeling Connected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once an intranet replacement is available, ensure this is a forum for connecting with others</li> <li>Building on the success of wellbeing initiatives by organising more regular opportunities to connect e.g. a monthly lunchtime walk / run</li> </ul> <p><b>Positive Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to explore the best ways to engage and communicate with our staff as our experience of hybrid working grows</li> <li>Embed wellbeing culture and ensure all staff are aware of it</li> <li>Embedding of new Whistleblowing procedure</li> </ul>		



## 12. Working together for wellbeing – key groups

**SPSO Leadership team** leads, supports and promotes the wellbeing agenda, has overall responsibility for providing a safe and healthy environment for staff and monitors organisational performance relevant to wellbeing and taking appropriate action

**Managers** ensure a safe work environment for all staff, provide adequate training and support with performance, help promote work-life balance and minimise factors that contribute towards stress, create an environment in which staff can raise issues with their line manager. Where issues are raised, they ensure that they are handled in line with the relevant policies

**Human resources team** develop and review our Health and Wellbeing Handbook, which brings together all of our policies relating to health and wellbeing, provide assistance to line managers when supporting staff with wellbeing queries and issues, handle wellbeing queries from staff (may or may not be in conjunction with the line manager), ensure that the organisation and its leaders and managers have appropriate learning and development in place to support wellbeing

**Employees** engage with arrangements to support wellbeing, report health and safety incidents or ill health quickly, familiarise themselves with key policies (Health and Safety etc), complete mandatory training, appropriately raise any workplace issues that they consider have the potential to impact health and wellbeing (whether their own or someone else's)



**Facilities management** support staff with issues raised in DSE Assessments, review health and safety policies, ensure a safe and comfortable working environment, appropriately raise any issues that need addressed with managers, arrange fire evacuation and facilitate fire drills

**Wellbeing Action Group** develop and deliver an annual wellbeing action plan, develop and deliver a calendar of wellbeing initiatives to raise awareness of wellbeing issues, make recommendations to SPSO Leadership Team on mechanisms to enhance wellbeing

## 13. Review and publication

- 13.1 We recognise the importance of evaluating the success of this strategy. We will:
- monitor indicators of wellbeing including sickness and turnover rates
  - review annual staff survey results to assess morale and responses to specific wellbeing questions
  - monitor the uptake and feedback from health and wellbeing initiatives to ensure continued effectiveness.
- 13.2 We will publish a short annual report each year of our progress against the aims and objectives set out in this strategy.