LANCASHIRE SCHOOLS FORUM  
Date of meeting 24 October 2017

Item No 6

Title: School Occupational Health Service

Appendix A refers

Executive Summary
At the request of the Forum Chair, information on recent issues connected with the OH Assist service has been provided.

The Service Delivery Manager Health, Safety and Quality from the Health, Safety and Resilience Service will attend for this item to provide an update.

Forum Decision Required

The Forum is asked to:
 a) Note the report;
 b) Express any views on the School Occupational Health Service.
School Occupational Health Service
The Forum Chair has raised concerns about the new Occupational Health on-line referral system for schools, indicating that there are some problems with the system that are costing schools time and money and adding considerably to the occupational stress of school managers and employees.

In response to this, the Service has provided the Forum with a recent update submitted to the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Forum (JNCF). This is provided at Appendix A.

The Service Delivery Manager Health, Safety and Quality from the Health, Safety and Resilience Service will attend for this item to provide an update.
OH Assist Update

Prior to 24th July 17
The OH assist contract was working well prior to 24th July, we had received some very positive feedback from managers and schools about the quality and content of the reports and the speed at which referrals were being processed. There were also very few complaints. Then it all started to go wrong. On 24th July OH Assist implemented a change to a new electronic referral system that they had been working on for over a year. Details of the system had been provided to LCC prior to the proposed transfer, it had been checked by BTLS and we had approved it for use from the point of view of the CC. Rigorous testing of the system had been completed by OH Assist and an external agency and as a result, a few changes had been made. Expectations were that the system was 'State of the Art' and would streamline some of the processes, introduce a number of new options and reduce the reliance in some areas on 'bespoke' referrals that often required some manual input and resulted in delays.

Current issues
Unfortunately when the system went live on 24th July 17, immediately problems were experienced across all of OH Assist's customer base. OH Assist have identified the reason as being the volume or records transferred and unfortunately as their IT staff fixed one area of the system, another part crashed.

OH Assist are using a number of electronic and manual workarounds for the system but are experiencing significant delays due to the backlog that built upon when the system crashed and no appointments could be scheduled and also the amount of time that their staff spent on the telephone responding to queries and complaints. OH Assist have advised that they have taken on more support staff to deal with the volume of calls but the benefit of this has not yet been experienced by LCC as managers and schools are often waiting on the helpline for periods of up to or over an hour.

OH Assist have advised that in some cases managers and schools can now log onto the system and see their referral but it will appear that no action has been taken for some time as visibility within the system has been affected and part of the process has to be carried out manually. In addition to compound the problem as they are running an electronic and manual system simultaneously to try and clear backlogs, there have been instances of double bookings, so 2 staff may be booked for the same appointment and one has to be cancelled at short notice. Update received 28th Sept is that the scheduling function has now been resolved and the possibility of double bookings of this nature has been eradicated.

The main workaround for the LCC contract at the moment is that the HS&Q Team are taking responsibility for all urgent calls and queries for the time being. We are then flagging these with OH assist and they are dedicating resources to deal with the urgent queries which are being prioritised by the HS&Q Team working with managers and schools. There are still some referrals that have been outstanding since the end of August, therefore unless managers and schools give us a reason why more recent referrals should be prioritised, we are dealing with the older ones first. We are also prioritising pre-employment referrals so that new starters can start work and be paid.
HR have agreed a workaround for pre-employment referrals in cases where the employee has indicated that they do not have any of the medical conditions noted in the questionnaire and confirms that they are not currently taking medication, these pre-employments are currently being accepted by Payroll in order that they employee can be set up for payment without full OH clearance.

HR are also considering the implications of temporarily relaxing the referral requirement for cases where managers are up to date with an employee's situation, there are no issues and the manager or school does not require any support for a return to work. The concern is that if this relaxation is implemented, although it will ease the burden on referrals allowing resources to be applied to urgent cases, once we return to business as usual, it will may be difficult to re-introduce the referral requirement.

The latest Comms on the intranet has advised that there is no point in managers calling the helpline as they will be kept waiting which adds to the frustration and also expense as this is a premium rate call line. Therefore we are trying to ensure calls about urgent cases are directed to HS&Q.

Indications from OH Assist are that it will be 8-12 weeks before they are able to return to business as usual.

**Current position for LCC**
We are currently working with colleagues in Procurement, HR and BTLS to identify whether a proposal recently suggested by OH Assist will be of benefit. This is still in its initial stages and I am therefore unable to provide any more details. If the proposal is accepted, it is like that we will see a return to business as usual within 4-6 weeks which although still unacceptable is significantly shorter that the timeframe OH Assist are suggesting for the rest of their service.

**Why aren't we doing anything else?**

- The OH profession is such that it is difficult for the CC to obtain services in the general marketplace. The last time we went out to tender, we used a framework and out of 9 companies on the framework, only 2 submitted bids. As you may be aware, the intention was to offer the contact to another bidder, however due to issues with the contract this was pulled at the last minute and we reverted to the second placed bidder – OH Assist.

- A previous proposal to deliver services in-house had been rejected, however due to the current issues with OH Assist, this is being re-considered by colleagues in Public Health as a potential longer term option.

- Due to the difficulties experienced by OH Assist, we had considered approaching other companies on the framework, that did not bid last time, to ask if they could provide a quotation for a short term service until either OH Assist were back on track or until we could prepare a re-tender. However this came to nothing as we became aware that in order to grow their business, OH Assist are buying up small competitors and taking on their OH nurses. At the
same time, we were considering this option, OH Assist offered us the proposal that is currently being considered.

- The CC must have access to an OH service, this is a legal duty under the health and Safety at Work Act.

- The CC is unable to piggy-back on the service provision of any other Councils etc. as our requirements mean that we would swamp their contract and create problems for them. Individual schools may find that if they choose to approach OH providers, they will be accepted as they are much smaller. However the CC would urge caution when considering costs and the information requirements of any other providers.

- The final option is to go to re-tender and this is still being considered as a viable, however the proposal that OH Assist have recently put forward may mean that this is unnecessary and the set up time would be much quicker than re-tendering therefore it is felt that we must give this a try first.

**Additional update**

There is a further meeting with Procurement and BLTS on 4th Oct 17 to try and move forward the OH Assist proposal.

Heads of Service and Management Team are kept up to date on a weekly basis with any developments and messages are updated on the internet and schools portal for managers and employees.