

Employer Case Study: Mental Health and Wellbeing

Melin Homes



Cymru Iach ar Waith
Healthy Working Wales

Melin Homes has been identified as an exemplar employer for this case study on mental health and wellbeing due to a positive and continued approach to improving employees' mental and physical health and wellbeing. Melin Homes has achieved the Healthy Working Wales (HWW) Platinum Corporate Health Standard (CHS) and is a Pledged Organisation for Time to Change Wales (TtCW).

Healthy Working Wales Covid-19 Commendation Award

HWW and the Welsh Government joined forces to celebrate the way in which Welsh employers stepped up to look after the health and wellbeing of their staff, clients and the wider community during the global coronavirus pandemic by holding a [Covid-19 Commendations Event](#) in December 2021.

Melin Homes was awarded the winning commendation for Best SME Company Response for Supporting Staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. The range of support that

Melin Homes offers to their staff via the Zest wellbeing programme, and how they adapted and enhanced support, impressed the panel of judges. The judging panel included Wales CBI, Federation of Small Businesses and Chambers Wales, as well as Wales TUC, Mind Cymru and Public Health Wales.

About Melin Homes

Melin Homes is a registered social landlord based in Pontypool, providing affordable homes and services to people living in South East Wales. The housing association currently has 250 staff and exists to create opportunities for people and communities to thrive.

Melin Homes is well established within the local communities in which it operates. As one of the major housing associations in Wales, it owns and manages over 4,000 homes in Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Powys.

In addition to offering homes for rent, it offers properties for sale through a low-cost home ownership scheme and a subsidiary organisation [Candleston](#).

The Melin Homes team supports residents to manage their rent payments and helps people get into work, to get online and to claim benefits, as well as helping people budget well and save money on energy. By helping to keep people in their homes, the organisation is working towards building resilient communities.

Melin Homes has worked with HWW since 2012 when first setting out on its health and wellbeing journey and signed the TtCW Employer Pledge in 2014, pledging to do what they can to end mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. These actions have helped guide their work to ensure policies and culture are supportive of people with mental health problems. Melin Homes regularly run campaigns to ensure there is no stigma around mental health, including providing workshops for staff, clear messages to staff and residents - all of which are backed up by support.

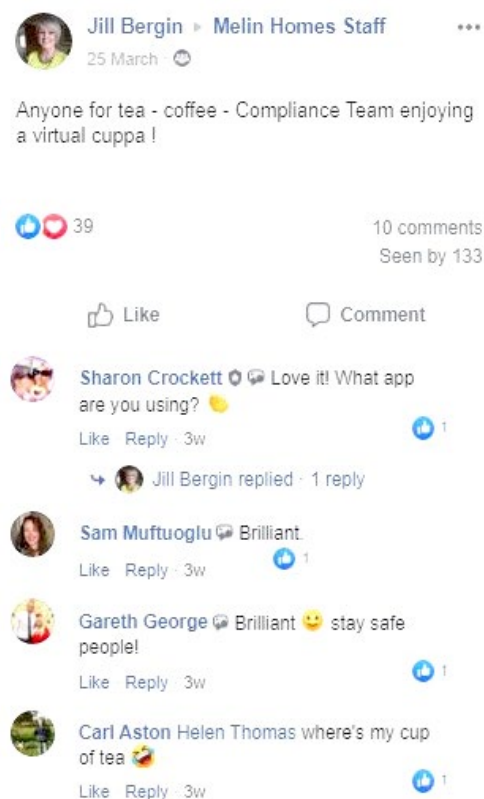


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“We signed the TtCW Employer Pledge in 2014 because we are passionate about helping support employees and encouraging other employers to end mental health stigma and discrimination. This is really important to us and we actively support TtCW with the activities we run at Melin, encouraging people to take time out of the day to talk openly. In May 2022, we renewed our pledge to reaffirm to staff and partners the importance of putting an end to mental health stigma and discrimination.

We have prioritised talking about mental health and our senior management team and board lead by example. Recently our board member, Julie, shared her mental health journey as part of a collective campaign with other partnership housing associations. By being open and honest, and making the topic part of everyday conversations we can break down the barriers.

We have been re-awarded the HWW Gold and Platinum Corporate Health Standard which is the national mark of quality for health and wellbeing in larger workplaces. We have also been awarded an HWW and Welsh Government Covid-19 Commendation Award for Best SME Company Response for Supporting Staff during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are very proud of the inclusive culture with a focus on wellbeing we have created at Melin – signing the TtCW pledge really does help shape and mould your organisation. We would be happy to support other organisations on their journey; they just need to get in touch.”

Paula Kennedy, Chief Executive, Melin Homes

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Zest has helped shape the company response to Covid-19 and supported employees through challenging circumstances

zest!

The 'Zest' Initiative

Zest was launched in September 2011 as Melin Homes wanted to help improve the health and wellbeing of staff. Staff and board members got together to form a Zest working group which meets monthly to plan activities and act as ambassadors. The Zest ethos ensures that mental health and wellbeing runs through all aspects of the organisation. The initiative is championed by staff at all levels, including at senior management and board levels.

Melin Homes provides an annual health and wellbeing event Zest Fest, for which all staff are gifted the time to attend, providing free breakfasts, exercise classes, pampering sessions and craft workshops. Partners from other organisations are also in attendance to provide sessions, help and advice. In addition, regular activities are held for staff including smoothie mornings, healthy breakfasts, awareness raising sessions, massages and mindfulness.

During the global pandemic, Zest was adapted and enhanced with new activities, many delivered online. These included virtual get-togethers, topic specific drop-ins, health checks, counselling services, cycle to work schemes, pool bikes, staff recognition schemes and planting trees for loved ones. Additional activities included resilience training and ensuring staff had free access to a mindfulness app. As a result of this Zest has helped shape the company response to Covid-19 and supported employees through challenging circumstances.



"We have 17 Zest ambassadors across Melin Homes to ensure we have representatives from all departments."

"Zest, our staff health and wellbeing initiative, runs through everything we do at Melin Homes."

"We are always refreshing what we do and consulting with staff. We already do so much, and we will keep doing what we're doing and looking for fresh new innovative ways to engage with staff."

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Steps to Success

The Zest programme is valued by the organisation and staff. Its success and longevity is most likely a result of a range of elements working coherently together:

- Commitment from senior management and board members
- Identification of staff ambassadors
- Establishment of a monthly working group
- Commitment to mental health and wellbeing visible throughout organisational processes and strategies
- Wellbeing incorporated into staff review process, including prompts for managers
- Provision of a range of regular activities, delivered in a variety of ways
- Dedicated staff time for mental health and wellbeing activities
- Promotion of national campaigns such as Mental Health Awareness Week and Time to Talk Day with related activities for staff

- Engagement and involvement of external organisations able to positively contribute to staff mental health and wellbeing, for example:
 - Workshops for managers to improve support for their staff
 - Wellbeing sessions
 - Lectures
 - Workshops
- Specific mental health training for staff with line management responsibility
- Accredited member of staff trained to have effective conversations with staff about mental health and wellbeing
- Dedicated health and wellbeing section on the staff intranet site
- Monthly emails promoting good mental wellbeing in the workplace
- Collation and promotion of staff stories to celebrate achievement and inspire others
- Signposting to information and services
- Online resources including recordings of any workshops run for staff
- Regular consultation with staff and opportunities for feedback, for example, one-to-one conversations, surveys, meetings and drop-in opportunities
- Communication via a range of means, for example, email, intranet, social media and TV screens
- Dedicated budget for Zest activities



“Zest is fully supported by our Senior Management Team and Board as they actively promote and take part, encouraging their teams to take time out for themselves too.”

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Our Zest ambassador code

Z - Zest	Live and breath everything Zest
E - Enjoy	Enjoy being part of Zest!
S - Support	Support each other and others
T - Talk	Talk and interact
C - Champion	Act as a champion for health and wellbeing
O - Organise	Organise and manage Zest events
D - Deliver	Deliver effective Zest initiatives and messages
E - Engage	Engage with everyone and encourage participation



Snapshot: 2021 activities and campaigns

Activities started in January in order to combat the “January blues”. Melin Homes sent every member of staff a box of healthy goodies as a surprise. There were further feel-good activities planned throughout the rest of the year. Staff were able to take part in secret kindness days which allowed staff to leave secret gifts around the offices for other members of staff as a surprise.

Over the course of the year, there were four free breakfast events to encourage staff to come together and chat.

For Time to Talk Day in February, Melin Homes delivered a virtual event for staff to attend, gifting staff time out of their working day to grab a cuppa, something to eat and have a chat with colleagues. In addition, the senior management team was asked to feature in a series of videos encouraging people to talk about their mental health which can be viewed on a YouTube channel:

- [Joanne](#)
- [Scott](#)
- [Paula](#)
- [Sharon](#)

For Mental Health Awareness Week in May, Melin Homes gifted all staff, including board members, a subscription to Headspace – a personal guide to mindfulness, meditation, sleep, exercise and more.

“Our senior management team openly talk about their mental health, which sets the tone for the rest of the organisation.”

“Feedback from staff has shown that the app is very much valued, with activities such as sleepcasts and meditation proving the most popular things to do on there.”

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"We recently asked staff if they felt Melin Homes cared about their health and wellbeing and 99% of staff said yes!"

"91% of staff agreed they could make a valuable contribution to the success of the organisation."

Examples of workshops

Nutrition – Four nutrition sessions were delivered at the Zest: Staying Healthy Event in 2021 by a nutritional therapist to support energy, mental health and resilience:

- **Keeping Energy Balanced** – This session covered an eating routine that can be adapted to individual needs to support energy levels and focus
- **Managing Stress and Boosting Mood** – This session covered what happens when we're under pressure and how to eat to boost resilience and mood
- **Supporting Immunity** – This session covered simple things to do with diet and lifestyle to boost immunity, and why supplements aren't the most important thing
- **Sleeping Well** – This session covered why sleep is important, the things that may be keeping us awake and the things that improve sleep

Impact on Staff Health and Wellbeing

Staff surveys have highlighted how the Zest initiative has enabled many staff to improve their health and wellbeing and make a number of positive changes including:

- Becoming more active
- Stopping smoking
- Making healthier food choices
- Becoming less stressed
- Learning new skills

As a result of these changes, Melin Homes experienced:

- Improvements in levels of staff engagement
- Increased staff satisfaction levels across the company
- Despite the pandemic, sickness absence rates remained below 5% during 2021 and were down to 2.2% in May 2022
- Officially recognised as one of the UK's best companies to work for, featuring on three *Sunday Times* 'Best Companies to Work For' lists in 2022:
 - Number 73 in the UK's '100 Best Large Companies to Work For'
 - Number 6 in 'Housing's 25 Best Associations to Work For' in the UK, and Number 2 in Wales!
 - Number 17 in 'Wales' 30 Best Companies to Work For'

"Despite working from home and living through a pandemic, 89% of staff are happy with the balance between work and home life."



November 2022