# Local government leadership under pressure as mental health support takes a backseat



Wellbeing is not a luxury but a fundamental pillar of a healthy organisation—particularly within the chaotic landscape of local government, where leadership is under relentless pressure. Yet, instead of prioritising the mental health of those entrusted with public service, the current political climate seems more concerned with spin and spectacle than genuine support. In this context, safeguarding mental health and wellbeing should be a non-negotiable, especially as leaders are burdened by the ongoing upheaval of restructuring, devolution, and the relentless glare of political scrutiny. This neglect undermines not only individual resilience but the very credibility of our local institutions.

Leadership should be grounded in stability, compassion, and integrity—yet recent developments suggest a departure from these principles. Snippets of policy talk about "resilience" and "support networks" are hollow if politicians focus more on image than meaningful action. There's a disturbing tendency to ignore the toll this relentless pressure takes on those at the frontline of local governance. Support and empathy are more than just buzzwords; they are fundamental to creating a resilient workforce capable of navigating the storm of political games and organisational chaos.

As local government leaders face constant reorganisations, only an emphasis on practical wellbeing strategies can prevent organisational chaos from spiralling into burnout and disillusionment. Reconnecting leadership with core purpose and values isn’t just good rhetoric—it’s essential for stability. Yet, in an era where political agendas often overshadow genuine concern for staff wellbeing, these measures are all too often dismissed or undervalued. Establishing strong peer networks and mentorship programs, advocating for workload management, and investing in resilience training should be standard fare—not optional extras. Unfortunately, the prevailing political environment seems more fixated on short-term wins than building sustainable leadership.

Research from global organisations underscores this neglect's true cost. The United Nations warns that mental health issues like depression and anxiety are eroding workplace productivity—yet, instead of addressing these challenges head-on, authorities continue to treat mental health as an afterthought. The World Health Organization highlights that mental health isn't just a personal issue but a crucial component of human capital. When mental wellbeing is sidelined, the result is a drain on resources—lost productivity, reduced morale, and an increased burden on already overstretched services.

The financial and human costs of ignoring mental health are staggering. The Society for Human Resource Management reports that anxiety and depression cost the global economy over $1 trillion annually—an indictment of governments and organisations that have failed to prioritise the mental wellbeing of their workforce. In local government, where resources are already stretched thin, continuing to neglect staff mental health risks not just reduced efficiency but outright organisational failure.

This neglect has a broader cultural impact. When mental health is deprioritised, employee retention suffers, organisational morale declines, and a toxic environment takes root. Reports indicate that nearly 90% of workers affected by mental health problems face job insecurity or dismissal, often because support systems are inadequate or non-existent. Such environments fuel absenteeism and presenteeism alike, draining the public purse and undermining public trust in local institutions. Leadership that overlooks these issues is not only failing its staff but risking the very fabric of community service.

From a health and safety perspective, mental health must be recognised as integral to workplace safety. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) highlights how widespread stress and untreated mental health conditions compromise safety standards. Instead of supporting staff through proactive mental health initiatives, officials continue to neglect this critical aspect of workplace well-being—an abdication that endangers everyone involved.

In the end, neglecting wellbeing in local government is a shortsighted and dangerous approach. Genuine leadership requires prioritising mental health and fostering supportive cultures—yet, in today's political climate, these objectives are often sidelined by short-term political gains. Success depends on recognising that a resilient, healthy workforce is the backbone of effective public service—one that is capable of weathering the storms of political upheaval and organisational change. Anything less risks the stability of our communities and the trust of those they serve.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.themj.co.uk/shining-light-mental-health> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/creating-healthy-workplace-improves-mental-wellbeing-and-productivity-%E2%80%93-un> - The United Nations highlights the significance of mental health in the workplace, noting that depression and anxiety disorders can impede work performance and productivity. Employers who implement initiatives to promote mental health and support employees with mental disorders not only enhance employee health but also boost workplace productivity. Conversely, a negative work environment may lead to physical and mental health issues, absenteeism, and decreased productivity. The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of understanding individual employee needs and creating a supportive environment to promote mental health in the workplace.
3. <https://www.shrm.org/foundation/workplace-mental-health> - The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) underscores the central role of mental health in organizational performance and employee well-being. Anxiety and depression are estimated to contribute $1 trillion in lost productivity globally each year. Creating mentally healthy workplaces ensures employees can cope with work demands, achieve their full potential, and contribute to organizational success. SHRM provides tools, training, and research to drive mental health initiatives, emphasizing that embedding mental health support strengthens productivity, retention, and cohesion.
4. <https://www.who.int/europe/health-topics/mental-health/promoting-good-mental-health-in-the-workplace> - The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes that mental health is a valuable source of human capital, contributing to individual and societal well-being, social interaction, and national productivity. Inadequate mental health services and societal stigma often prevent individuals from seeking care. WHO advocates for promoting mental health in the workplace by raising awareness, informing employees about available help, involving them in decision-making, offering career development programs, and recognizing work performance. These interventions aim to protect and promote mental health, benefiting both individuals and organizations.
5. <https://www.thegcindex.com/the-importance-of-wellbeing-and-wellness-in-the-workplace/> - The GC Index discusses the critical importance of employee well-being in the workplace, highlighting statistics such as up to 300,000 people with mental health problems losing their jobs each year. The article emphasizes that 89% of workers with mental health problems report an impact on their working life. It underscores the need for organizations to prioritize mental health to enhance productivity, reduce absenteeism, and improve employee retention. The piece also highlights the benefits of creating a supportive work environment that promotes mental wellness.
6. <https://www.aseonline.org/News-Events/ASE-News/EverythingPeople-This-Week/the-importance-of-mental-health-in-the-workplace-a-key-to-employee-wellbeing> - The article from the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) emphasizes the direct impact of mental health on employee productivity. Stress, anxiety, and depression can impair concentration, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities. By fostering a supportive environment that prioritizes mental health, employers can reduce absenteeism and presenteeism, leading to a more efficient and effective workforce. The piece also discusses how a focus on mental health improves employee retention and cultivates a positive and inclusive company culture.
7. <https://www.osha.gov/media-center/features/2024-09-23> - The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) highlights the importance of supporting workers' mental well-being for overall worker safety and health. Stress is a common experience, with 71% of adults in the U.S. reporting at least one sign of stress in 2016. The article underscores the need for employers to recognize and address mental health issues in the workplace to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all employees.