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**Governance Code for Sport**

**Mental Health Charter**

Guidance Notes

Disclaimer

Sport Ireland is making available a range of resources including guidance notes, policy documents and templates for selected areas aligned to the Governance Code for Sport which will support sport organisations, boards, management and staff in the development of relevant governance processes and procedures particular to their own organisation.

For the avoidance of doubt, the final decision on the nature, type, extent and format of approved governance policies, procedures and processes for each organisation is a matter for the board / highest governing structure of the organisation and the resources and material provided may assist the approval process.

This document is not, nor is it intended to be, a definitive statement of the law and it does not constitute legal advice.

This document is not a substitute for professional advice from an appropriately qualified source and it is recommended that sport organisations consult their governing document or obtain their own independent legal advice where necessary. Sport Ireland does not accept any responsibility or liability for any errors, inaccuracies or omissions in this document.

**Why an organisation needs a mental health charter?**

Welfare means the general care and support of participants, members, staff and volunteers within a sport. Everyone involved in sport and activity, whether they are a volunteer, staff member, participant, spectator or an elite athlete, should feel that the sport is one that cares about their health, safety and welfare. Welfare policies include those around mental health, alcohol and drugs, and gambling. Having a mental health charter demonstrates to the sports stakeholders that the organisation cares about the welfare of its participants. Good welfare policies within an organisation will seek to understand and support employees, volunteers and athletes, and show leadership within society as a whole.

Stress within a job or caused by the expectation of performance, or of external factors such as an economic downturn or having money worries can have a different effect on different people. It can affect some people’s mental and physical health. This can lead to pressures on individuals, relationships, families and friends and in the workplace. Like physical health, organisations should also look after staff and volunteer’s mental health and seek to provide support in order to aid recovery. Having a mental health charter helps signpost the organisation in terms of what to do around mental health, how to spot the signs of difficulty and what actions to take.

Having a mental health charter speaks to a number of the principles of the Code, especially:

* Principle 1: Leading our organisation
* Principle 5. Behaving With Integrity

Having a mental health charter is important because:

* It protects the welfare of staff, volunteers, athletes and coaches
* It underpins the culture and values of the organisation
* It shows the organisation as providing leadership within society

Whose responsibility is it to develop a mental health charter?

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that all the principles of the Code are being upheld and delivered. The executive lead / Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is tasked with ensuring that the principles of the Code are being implemented in the organisation and thus will be responsible for ensuring there are welfare policies, including a mental health charter in use in the organisation. In larger Type C organisations there may be a Head of Human Resources whose role will include producing welfare policies, including those around mental health.

What should a mental charter include?

* Explanation of the aim of the charter, e.g.:
  + To support the health and wellbeing of its members, staff and volunteers
* Explanation of what mental illness and stress are
* Explanation of the symptoms of unmanaged stress
* Explanation of what the organisation will do to reduce stress in the workplace, e.g.
  + Maximise communication and consultation particularly at a time of change
  + Make training clearly job-related
  + Ensure regular appraisal on job performance
  + Provide good working conditions – adequate space, minimum noise levels, controlled heating, natural light and ventilation
  + Alternating work that may be more rewarding and less rewarding
  + Ensure fair distribution of work
  + Encourage good staff networks
  + Employee Assistance Programmes
* Explanation of how members, athletes, and volunteers can be supported e.g., via the club network
* Explanation on how individuals can look after their own mental health, e.g.
  + Taking one day at a time
  + Not seeking to be a perfectionist
  + Talking about it and asking for help
  + Taking a break
  + Planned recreation
* Explanation of the broader supports that can be made available within the sport e.g., confidential discussions, mental health support, charity partnerships, etc.
* Details of mental health charities e.g., Aware, Samaritans, etc.
* Any partnerships the organisation has with mental health charities or how it may support its athletes to become ambassadors for mental health

Implementing a mental health charter: how and when to use it

Board, staff and volunteers can be given a copy of the Charter on their induction, and it should be included in the employee handbook and into the documentation shared with volunteers. A copy could be on the organisation’s website, and on display at the company’s offices. The organisation should also share it though the membership and seek to ensure that it is in place (perhaps through workshops) at club and athlete level, where it may have greatest impact.

Further links and resources

[Mental Health Ireland Website](https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/)