

Support during the pandemic

Roadchef

Roadchef is one of Britain's leading roadside service area operators, welcoming more than 52 million customers every year. We operate in 30 different locations on the motorway and major trunk roads across the length and breadth of the country. We are the only MSA with IIP Gold accreditation (2020) and are recognised by Transport Focus as the best operator.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government regarded motorway services as an essential service, and their staff as key workers to ensure the essential provisions of fuel, food, drink, rest and toilet facilities to support the freight and logistics sector, and key workers travelling on the Strategic Road Network.

Despite being required to stay open it was not financially feasible to have all of our outlets open and therefore at the height of the pandemic 78% of our employees were on furlough. This caused much anxiety and worry for many of them, so ensuring we maintained engagement and supported their wellbeing whilst on furlough was a critical part of our strategy during the pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic we recognised that health and wellbeing was of increasing importance both for our existing and potential employees but this became particularly relevant during the pandemic. Whilst we had started to make strides within this area we wanted to support our employees more. Our experiences of employee issues had led us to understand wellbeing better and given us an insight into what we could do to support them. Our evolving company culture is steering us away from a focus on hard business metrics into a more people focused arena where employee wellbeing is not something to be ignored or hidden away but something to be open about and an area on our people strategy to be proud of.

Our business goals during the pandemic were:

- Continue to enhance our wellbeing offering and support for employees, whether mental health or financial wellbeing
- Align our wellbeing activities with our evolving company culture and ensure people are always at the heart of the business
- Use our wellbeing activities to support cultural and leadership change within the business
- Use improved wellbeing support as a way of improving employee engagement and retention within the business.

As we were a vital function in keeping the road network open to allow key supplies and essential workers to travel, the team had to review, revise, develop and implement robust people practices in response to the global pandemic. This was to ensure employees felt fully engaged, supported and connected with the business, irrespective of whether they had remained at work or had been asked to take furlough leave. The teams across the business worked collaboratively with other functional departments, to bring new practices and procedures into the business which added real value and received significant praise for their excellent delivery. With over 78% of employees on furlough leave at the height of the pandemic, the team had to embrace and influence others to use technology such as Google Meet and WhatsApp to aid communication and engagement.

We have a range of initiatives to support our employees. These range from both already existing initiatives that were re-energised during the pandemic, and new initiatives that were introduced during the pandemic.

Existing initiatives in place pre Covid-19

- Wagestream - a financial wellbeing app so employees can access a percentage of their earned wages prior to payday, as well as financial advice and tips. This also provides a saving facility to encourage employees to plan for times of financial difficulty.
- HAPI benefits- a platform for employees to access a range of discounts, as well as a range of wellbeing resources
- Employee Assistance Helpline.
- Hospital plan - an optional benefit for employees, to alleviate some of the financial stress bought by a stay in hospital.

All of the above initiatives were relaunched through various methods during the pandemic, including individual employee letters, newsletters, training and through the Joint Consultative Committee forums. This was to remind employees of the support available.

Initiatives introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Hardship loans - an interest free employer loan, for employees in financial difficulty. Hardship loans were introduced in 2020 to support employees through any hardship caused by Covid-19 and we have continued to offer these. An example of this is recently when an employee's close relative passed away unexpectedly. Our employee felt confident to speak to their manager to say they could not afford to pay for the funeral so the company supported them with an interest free hardship loan to fund this.

- Wellbeing Week - a dedicated area within the team rooms, containing lots of information to support employees as well as fresh fruit to help themselves to. The week also included giving away wellbeing prizes, such as Spa breaks, shopping vouchers and an additional paid day off.
- Launched the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme in all sites - this not only supported our customers coming into our business, but also our employees who had hidden disabilities themselves.
- A weekly bulletin was set up to ensure all colleagues, furloughed or working were aware of the current guidelines both within their place of work and for the country as a whole. This bulletin also provided news from the business and fun activities such as virtual quizzes, competitions, jokes etc. This then turned into a weekly newsletter that is still being sent out to all colleagues updating them with any company news, celebrating successes and includes fun elements and competitions for everyone to participate.
- We sent out a wellbeing booklet to every colleague, this included fact sheets, gave advice on where to seek support and included a tea bag to encourage people to take care of their mental health and relax during what was a very stressful time for everyone, no matter their circumstance.
- Welcome back bags - as employees returned to work from furlough, they were issued with a bag, containing a Keeping you safe at work leaflet (copy attached), hand sanitiser, bottle of water, chocolate bar and healthy cereal bar. This was to help the employees ease back into work after being away for several months.
- Reorientation e-learning - all employees completed this programme to support them with all of the changes and guidelines whilst at work.
- Dedicated website for employees on furlough for them to access newsletters, and wellbeing information
- Our CEO recorded a number of Vlogs to update employees on company news and took personal responsibility for running a series of virtual quiz nights for our functional teams
- Introduced e-learning training modules specifically around mental health and wellbeing to support and educate employees
- Manager and Team Member Well Being check in sessions on google hangout or phone.

Initiatives introduced since the Covid-19 pandemic

- Completing Mental Health First Aider training in every site. We have trained 60 MHFA in the business and continue to train additional managers, and

monitor to ensure that we have the correct numbers of people trained at any given time

- Having fun events on site, such as an ice cream van, with free ice cream for employees, family fun days, cinema nights, and BBQ's
- Launch of new Wellbeing Policy and training

We also have a wellbeing project team, who regularly update the company progress to the senior management team. Some of our most senior leaders have attended Mental Health First Aid training.

We have a range of methods available for honest employee feedback through employee surveys such Best Companies, Brand specific surveys, new starter and exit interviews. We always create action plans from results and review these regularly. We also have "TellMark" where employees can raise ideas and concerns to the CEO.

We believe that the above initiatives demonstrate how we continue to go above and beyond for our employees in the area of mental health and wellbeing.

We have continued to monitor our employees feedback on the work around mental health and wellbeing during our employee survey, and have seen a change in comments. Employees comment on how they feel their wellbeing is taken seriously. We have also seen an increase in use of our Employee Assistance Helpline, in particular the telephone counselling, which was previously rarely used. In 2021, 47% of calls to the helpline were for counselling, and 40% were mental health related.

Wellbeing week was positively received across the business (newsletter attached) and the management teams encouraged employees to visit the wellbeing area and look at the various posters and leaflets containing a range of different advice and support. Many wellbeing prizes were given out, which were greatly appreciated by the team. Wellbeing week will be an annual focus on Wellbeing. This year's week runs from 27th June to 1st July. The focus will be on 'Our Five ways to Wellbeing'. Each day of wellbeing week will have a particular focus.

It is important to check in with employees on a regular basis. We have added a wellbeing section on all reviews, where employees can tick a box for how they are feeling. Talking about feelings can be uncomfortable, so we have a range of happy/sad faces for them to open a discussion on how they are feeling. This is another method to encourage employees to talk about their mental health and wellbeing.

Informal conversations are just as important and so all of our managers speak to their teams on shift daily to see how they are feeling and to offer any support if needed.

We have introduced Deputy which is a time and attendance app. Employees can talk to their line manager through the app with any issues they have around shifts/holiday bookings or other issues, as well as being a platform for any communications around any wellbeing initiatives/activities.

Our Mental Health First Aiders are on all sites and are trained to recognise when employees may need support. We also added wellbeing training into our HR courses, so all members of management recognise when an employee is suffering with poor mental health.

Not all employees have a smartphone, so we ensure that no employees have fallen through the cracks by having tablets fixed to walls in team rooms, which access Deputy. This offers IT support, so they can access these systems, as well as making things available via hard copy posters for notice boards.

We have reminders of wellbeing support available across the business (which is audited), and a wellbeing corner in our weekly business newsletter.

Most of our Managers were previously focused on trading and sales for the business. As a result of the initiatives put in place, we have seen a cultural shift, where Managers naturally consider their employees wellbeing more now and not just the trading of the business.

All of the above areas have had a positive impact on employees. We have seen a positive shift in employees asking for support and talking about their mental health. An example of this can be seen in the hardship loan, and counselling uptake.

Over the last 18 months the business has continued to be in a period of recovery following the pandemic. As restrictions eased we saw a significant upturn in footfall resulting in increased trading levels. Understanding which outlets to trade and for which periods of the day has been a key challenge to ensure we maximise sales, whilst ensuring we meet the operational execution expectations of each of our franchise partners. Throughout this, we relaunched our EAP, and prioritised keeping our employees morale high.

We have experienced employees feeling anxious as restrictions are lifted and sales increase, one of our challenges has been ensuring employees feel safe whilst at work with the increased interaction with colleagues and customers. We also had to ensure that employees aren't forgotten, ensuring regular contact took place during furlough, including a CMCT newsletter, updating the teams (both working and on

furlough) of what was happening within the business and offering wellbeing support (copy attached).

Some sites are advocates for employee wellbeing, our vision for improving our wellbeing culture is to see consistency across business. Having recently completed a Best Companies survey, this has shown our fantastic areas of improvement, and areas of opportunity for this year.

Our objectives for improving our wellbeing culture as a result of these challenges are:

- Maximise communication avenues to keep employees informed
- Increase the number of Mental Health First Aiders in the business ensuring all employees have access to a MHFA
- Explore / research wider initiatives that would compliment activities already in place to enhance our wellbeing offering
- Drive activities on our employee engagement action plans to improve employee wellbeing, as measured by our Best Companies to Work For results

Our evolving culture and in particular our growing focus on wellbeing can be measured through our 2021 Best Companies to Work For employee engagement surveys. In February 2021, engagement of our employees on the wellbeing factor was 5% ahead of a typical 1 star accredited business and in November 2021 was 3% ahead of a typical 2 star accredited business.

Employee comments specifically around wellbeing in the survey included:

“The messages about mental health from Mark Fox, CEO and HR are refreshing and encouraging”

“Our team cares about each other and it's ok to say I'm struggling. Information sharing has been amazing in the past 12 months and we are lucky to have Senior Leaders who really care about our wellbeing”.

We have also supported an increased number of employees with flexible working, including those that are not linked to childcare support. We offer a range of shifts that allow not only our employees flexibility, but also enables the business to have the right people in the right place for labour efficiency.

We also measured the success of the wellbeing strategy in a number of other ways as per the below:

- Wagestream - We have seen an increase in uptake of employees accessing Wagestream from 23% to 27% since the introduction of our overall wellbeing strategy Hardship loans - We have issued 40 hardship loans to employees since March 2020
- Hapi benefits - We have seen an increase in uptake of employees accessing the benefits platform and making use of the offers available
- Employee Assistance Programme - We have seen a continued increase in the number of calls to the EAP helpline and employees accessing the dedicated website for general guidance
- Training and Development - Over 6000 training sessions have been completed on the new wellbeing e-learning modules
- Employee turnover / retention figures - From March 2019 - 2021 we've seen a 26.2% improvement in employee retention. We accept that Covid has impacted this, however, our Health & Wellbeing initiatives have played a large part in reducing our overall employee turnover.
- Our attendance rates have only increased slightly during the pandemic, and these statistics include all Covid 19 absences.
- In 2021, there was a 14% reduction of employees being terminated on grounds of ill health for mental health related illnesses. We are supporting more employees to return to work. Our employees have felt that their wellbeing and mental health has been supported to come back to work in a safe way.

During the pandemic, it was vital to consider and develop new innovative ways to support our employees, whether working or on furlough. We believe the initiatives we put in place were positively received across the business at all levels.

Mental Health and wellbeing continues to be a key business focus and further initiatives are being launched throughout 2022 to build on the progression we have made in the last two years.