Like all businesses, since the pandemic began, we have adapted our work practices to ensure the safety of our colleagues, our customers and our community.

During COVID-19, we’ve seen overall sickness fall, but we know our staff still face mental health issues as a result of uncertainty around COVID-19.

Our wellbeing programme has helped support our business, and ultimately our employees, during this difficult time — it provides many resources and tools to support mental health. And our recently introduced mental health self-referral process means employees have access to the right services earlier and that this early intervention can help them to recover more quickly.

That resilience — and the company’s ability to adapt swiftly to deal with the demands of pandemic — stems from workplace policies and behaviours that have been embedded in the business for some time.

Anglian Water CEO, Peter Simpson highlights the benefits which flow from supporting ways of working that protect and promote wellbeing.
Employee wellbeing is sometimes seen as a health and safety issue which revolves around compliance and rules. But as a company, we realised that a happy workforce is also a highly productive and engaged workforce.

That ethos drives our decision-making. It is embedded in our values, and our business plan — and that is probably one of the most important messages I can pass on.

A successful workplace wellbeing programme is much more than a mission statement, or the provision of some add-on support or training. It is about an integrated approach which puts the health and happiness of your workforce at the heart of everything you do. Business in the Community’s Workwell Model provides an evidence-based framework that takes a whole person, whole-organisation approach to embedding wellbeing into organisational culture.

It is about realising that physical and mental health are inextricably linked. And it is about leadership at every level — from the boardroom down to individual team leaders and line managers.

But it is never too late to start that process, and there are always ways to improve what you do.

Many workplace changes forced on us by the pandemic — such as remote working, more flexible hours and a greater awareness of pressures outside work — are here to stay. They present a great catalyst for change, but they also present challenges in the ways we support staff.

For us, communication has been crucial, particularly around mental health issues. It’s important to be constantly looking for ways to start a conversation about mental health and in these uncertain times, it is also important to explain business decisions which impact colleagues quickly and clearly.

We have always produced video updates as a way of communicating with our staff, but the ever-changing situation created by the pandemic really emphasised the need to update teams quickly, to minimise stress and anxiety. Using this communication channel efficiently we have seen an increase of 400% in average views on COVID-related videos — which now average 3,500 per video.
Working from home has extended our duty of care and prompted us to find new approaches to issues such as domestic violence, and think about issues like loneliness and home-schooling, which previously had little or no focus. This has involved implementing more flexible working hours and introducing and highlighting systems for staff to ask to work in an office without having to explain why.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and different teams and settings demand different approaches. But once employee health and happiness are an integral part of your business, you will find that individual team leaders and line managers come up with new ways of starting conversations about wellbeing.

Believe me, it’s worth investing the time and resources to build a happier, healthier workforce. We received excellent feedback from our employees who told us they felt valued having joined our recent Time out for LIFE wellbeing days.

Productivity and customer service have also improved, and our strong employer brand has delivered significant improvements in recruitment — the average length of service for our workforce is 11 years.

These are very tangible benefits. But what sits at the core of Anglian Water is the firm belief that our people are our biggest asset — and we truly care about their wellbeing.