

Joint Audit and Governance Committee



Report of the Head of Corporate Services

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To: Joint Audit and Governance Committee

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Health and safety progress update

Recommendations

- (a) That the Committee notes the findings of the recent health and safety strategic review and the actions being progressed; and
- (b) Notes that biannual health and safety reports will be presented to the Joint Audit and Governance Committee.

Purpose of the report

1. To inform the Committee of the key findings and recommended actions of a recent strategic review of health and safety aimed to provide assurance on health and safety compliance and enable the councils to demonstrate adherence to the requirements of UK health and safety legislation.

Strategic Objectives

2. Managing the business effectively.

Background

3. As part of the ongoing commitment to a robust health and safety management system, this review was commissioned by the Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations and the Programmes and Assurance Manager, with the support of SMT. It followed a period where a number of changes had occurred at the councils and it was felt timely to review the current approach, identify the strengths and prioritise areas for improvement; and to remedy any gaps in the management arrangements for health and safety. There are two FTE vacancies in the new Customer Assurance team, we have employed a Health and Safety Consultant on a part time basis to undertake all health and safety at the councils pending recruitment to these roles.
4. The recommended actions identified support and contribute to more efficient and effective procedures and services; provide assurance of health and safety compliance; introduce mechanisms for the escalation of health and safety performance outcomes and enable the councils to demonstrate adherence to the requirements of UK health and safety legislation.

Key Findings

8. There is a corporate commitment to the implementation of a robust health and safety management system. While the motivation to act on health and safety in an organisation is often driven reactively due to an unwanted incident, event or accident, this review has been driven proactively to seek improvement.
9. There is a need to re-establish the prominence of health and safety as a key priority in two organisations with multiple priorities and limited resource.
10. Stakeholder feedback identified health and safety gaps and weaknesses, as well as examples of best practice, where some operational teams have a good reputation for working with health and safety as a priority, and a commitment for the highest standards of health and safety.
11. Quantitative metrics and formal reports to verify strong performance and to initiate action are currently unavailable, for example, health and safety training is provided, but mechanisms are required to monitor delivery vs. requirements. The councils' need to formalise a system of governance and assurance to verify the positives and focus effort on areas requiring improvement in the councils health and safety performance, through performance metrics, oversight and formal audit.
12. There is currently an inconsistent health and safety culture, which will become more consistent over time as a consequence of an enhanced governance framework. This will provide the mechanisms through which SMT and councillors will receive regular performance reports and prioritised recommendations for actions to improve performance and support service delivery across all teams.

Key Recommended Actions

13. Position the corporate health and safety team as independent from service delivery, analogous to the relationship of internal audit within finance.
14. Introduce service safety champions (SSC's) to support managers in the delivery of health and safety and be the 'glue' between the independent corporate health and safety team and service delivery, embarking on a joint programme of work to implement the health and safety management system in all services.
15. Revise the governance and assurance arrangements to facilitate independent oversight and challenge and ensure effective reporting.
16. Introduce a systematic approach to enhance the councils' reputation as an employer with compliant procedures and a consistent health and safety culture that is characterised by a drive for continual improvement.
17. Review the current operational arrangements in a prioritised and coordinated approach to improve compliance.
18. Adopt a corporate landlord model, to facilitate the strategic management of buildings, property and facilities management.
19. Commit to quarterly reporting to SMT and six-monthly reporting to the joint audit and governance committee.

Next Steps

20. SMT reviewed the findings and supported all the actions identified in the agreed action plan attached to this report (Appendix 1) for noting, outlining the key actions and proposed timeframe. Work is underway to recruit to the health and safety vacancies and the new property manager joined the councils in June. The health and safety policy outlining roles and responsibilities is currently being drafted for review.
21. **Covid 19 council response.** The assurance team leader and health and safety consultant attended the councils' triage response meetings, to advise on health and safety matters related to the community hub response and recorded any health and safety risks and mitigations. There were weekly reviews both at triage and SMT to ensure due diligence and to support the councils' decision making. The Covid-19 health and safety risk register is attached to this report as Appendix 2 for noting, which is linked to the corporate risk register where the impact of Covid-19 has been recorded across a wider context.

Financial Implications

22. The health and safety posts within the agreed structure are within existing budgets, and the current health and safety consultant is being funded from the budget for these posts. Any cost implications as a result of progress against agreed actions, that cannot be met within existing budgets, will be considered in accordance with normal budget approval processes.

Legal Implications

23. The councils have a statutory duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to ensure we have a robust health and safety management framework in place.

Risks

24. Risk identification is an integral part of this progress review.

Other Implications

25. None

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Next steps - Action Plan
- Appendix 2: Council response to Covid19 Health and safety risk register summary April 2020.