

JOINT AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Report of the Deputy Chief Executive – Transformation and Operations

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To: Joint Audit and Governance Committee

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Health and Safety Progress Review

Recommendation(s)

(a) That the committee undertakes a half-yearly progress review of Health and Safety actions as outlined in the Health and Safety strategic review and notes the progress made against the corporate Health and Safety Action Plan.

Purpose of the review

1. This is the next progress review of the Health and Safety actions as outlined in the Health and Safety Strategic review undertaken in 2019 and subsequent action plan. This review follows on from the joint audit and governance committee report on 29 March 2022.

Strategic Objectives

2. Managing the business safely underpins all our strategic objectives.

Background

3. As part of the ongoing commitment to a robust health and safety management system some key actions were outlined in a report to this committee in January 2021.
4. The actions support and contribute to more efficient procedures and services, provide for an assessment where necessary and an update of health and safety compliance. They 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.

Progress on actions

5. The move of the Health and Safety team to People and Culture has been positive. However, utilising the budget reserved for an unfilled vacancy to provide additional resource is ideally required to fully support the operational delivery of the councils' health and safety objectives. This is under evaluation to review the level and type of role and person required.
6. The programme of work to review and develop a suite of core policies that underpin the councils' health and safety management system continues. Through a process of collaborative work groups facilitated by health and safety, good worker involvement and the capture of best practice is being ensured. Key policies on the cusp of delivery include the councils' new Hybrid and Remote Working Policy to support the councils new working arrangements, the Lone Working Policy to consolidate the new safeguards the councils have put in place and the First Aid Policy to address the various council operated sites and the transient nature of the office users. In addition, advice and guidance has been provided to Strategic HR to develop the Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Misuse Policy, the Working Abroad Policy and Volunteering Policy.
7. With the approval of the Safety Champions forum complete, selection of suitable Safety Champions by the heads of service continues, with most areas now positively represented. The support pack for the Safety Champions is being developed and the start date for the forum remains pending.
8. Training continues to be an integral part of the competency framework for staff and ensuring good health and safety performance for the councils. In addition to the mandatory training requirements to work safely in the role, consideration is also being given to what forms of cultural health and safety training would benefit the councils.

For example, supported by the councils' wellbeing team, effective and cost-efficient ways to build and manage the mental resilience of the workforce are being explored and a plan of action developed. With this in place, the councils will be able to better monitor and manage the negative impacts of stress on the organisation and its staff as well as measure the effectiveness of the wellbeing strategies so they can be adapted where needed.

Current activities in this regard include consolidation of the findings from the 2019 workforce wellbeing surveys, refresher training for the Mental Health First Aiders, and practical workshops covering lone working, personal safety and conflict management to provide staff with the tools required to better manage stressful situations. In addition, a selection of informal networking activities devised and championed by the councils' wellbeing team are being run to help re-invigorate the informal communication routes in the new remote working climate.

9. Measuring health and safety performance continues and requires a robust reporting culture to enable the councils to adequately identify and manage health and safety risks. The Strategic Management Team (SMT) are provided with health and safety performance reports that inform on the actions required within their service areas, where applicable, to manage the risk and support the health and safety management system. The latest summary of the councils' performance is provided in Appendix 1.
10. Communication of health and safety matters is fundamental for good health and safety performance and the programme of work continues. To date, the new process to monitor staff awareness of changes in policies and processes through Leah, the councils' learning management system, is now in place and health and safety are now included for comments on gateway projects. The health and safety team are also working closely with the councils' communication team to improve and update and the councils' intranet pages.
11. Health and safety general activities continue to support across the whole organisation, with development of policies and procedures, advice and guidance for risk assessments, specific projects, new activities and incident investigations. Health and safety continue to administer the lone worker system and other council tools, organise and procure suitable health and safety training courses, and assist with site inspections as needed. In addition to the above, health and safety are also working with councils' internal audit team to help monitor health and safety compliance across the councils.
12. Continuous improvement of the health and safety management system is a key deliverable for enhancing the councils' performance. Health and safety continue to work to simplify and reduce the documentation and work burden on staff, through centralising policies and procedures.

Key performance indicators

13. Current key performance indicators relate to the number of incidents and near miss incidents. Appendix 1 provides a summary of incidents and near misses since the start of the financial year, April 2022 to present. Notable trends include the rise in incidents of abuse and threat to staff working directly with the public.

Financial Implications

14. There are financial implications if we fail to fulfil our duties under HASWA. These range from prosecution and fines for lack of suitable safety management procedures and implementation through to specific prosecution fines and claims

payments for not delivering safe plant, equipment, buildings, locations and processes.

15. The ongoing health and safety activity is taking place within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

16. As above there are legal implications if we fail to fulfil our duties under HASWA.

Risks

17. Risk identification is an integral part of our health and safety management system and of this progress review.

Other Implications

18. Any major incident or injury caused to staff, the public or our contractors as a result of failure in our health and safety system could result in significant reputational damage.

Background Papers

None

Appendix 1 - Health and Safety Key Performance Indicators

The graphs below provide a summary of incidents and near misses that have occurred at the councils, with a total of 10 incidents occurring since the start of this council year. Health and safety continue to champion the reporting of near misses / potentially dangerous (PDS) by staff. These incidents provide an opportunity for the councils to reduce their liability and protect from more serious and costly incidents occurring in the future. It should be noted that the rate of reporting is significantly lower than theoretically expected for the type and size of the organisation.

Abuse and threat to staff working directly with the public remains a concern, for councillors reading this report who face similar risk, the government has compiled some advice and guidance that you can use to stay safe, this is available for you to read at: local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation.

