

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

16 JULY 2025

HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

Report by Director of Property & Assets

RECOMMENDATION

The Audit & Governance Committee is RECOMMENDED to note and accept the contents of the Health and Safety (H&S) Annual Report and the work of the H&S Team to support services and improve performance keeping employees and customers safe.

Executive Summary

1. The Annual H&S Report (attached at Annex 1) is a summary of performance and is part of the corporate governance framework. It seeks to provide the Audit and Governance Committee with assurance that arrangements for managing health safety are suitable and sufficient whilst identifying areas for improvement.
2. This annual report contains information about the work of the Health and Safety (H&S) functions, the council's health and safety performance over the year and its plans for the coming year.

Background

3. This report is submitted on behalf of the Health and Safety Assurance Board (HSAB) as part of the Council's Corporate Governance Assurance Framework.
4. It is a statutory requirement of all employers to establish occupational health and safety management arrangements so that harm is either eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level. The Council has adopted best practice guidance published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to ensure that an effective health and safety management system is in place and that the duty of care objective is met.

Key Issues

5. Throughout 2024/25 the H&S Team have focused on reviewing and improving internal health and safety structures to ensure an efficient service targeted on real and significant risk.
6. In line with our policy and action plan we aim to build a safety culture that relates to the councils' values and following principles of:
 - Leadership commitment
 - Employee involvement
 - Open communication
 - Continuous learning
 - Pro-active approach

7. Ensuring health and safety is fundamentally about protecting people from harm and preventing occupational ill-health. The H&S Team have worked collaboratively with services and departments to ensure compliance and promote best practice in the following areas:
- Reducing work-related musculoskeletal disorders.
 - Protecting against harm from noise and vibration.
 - Learning from serious accidents such as finger entrapment.
 - Promoting safe off-site and adventure activities in schools.
 - Maintaining a safe and compliant estate.
8. As key indicator of effectiveness the total number of accident and incident reports has decreased for the second year running by 13%. It is worth noting that near-miss reporting has significantly increased which is a positive indicator and enables preventative action to be taken.
9. The council was served with a notice of contravention by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in relation to a finger entrapment accident at a maintained primary school. Working with the HSE the H&S Team have worked with the school to take necessary corrective measures to prevent similar incidents happening elsewhere and as a result the case has been closed with no further action.

Financial implications

10. There are no financial implications associated with this report. Checked by Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner.

Legal implications

11. There are several legal obligations that arise from the council's approach to health and safety. As noted below in relation to risk management, this has the potential to give rise to legal liability. The council's approach is appropriately captured in the annual report (for example, regarding the appointment of competent persons to assist with health and safety legal duties and the reporting of RIDDOR incidents). There are no further legal implications that arise from this report. Checked by Stephen Woodman, Solicitor.

Equalities implications

12. Health, safety, well-being, and equality, when proactively addressed, are all matters which improve the working environment for our employees and ensure that the council remains an attractive, safe and equitable place to work. In turn, this will support the efficient delivery of services to the people of Oxfordshire.

Sustainability implications

13. There are no sustainability implications associated with this report.

Risk Management

14. The Council must ensure have robust systems of internal control, covering health and safety. By reporting on health and safety performance the Senior Leadership Team can be provided with assurance that the following risks are being managed:

Reduce Injuries: Accidents and incidents can lead to persons suffering harm. This can lead to increased sickness absence, resourcing pressure, loss of motivation.

Legal Compliance: Failure to comply with the legal obligations of health and safety can result in liability for prosecution by regulators, such as the HSE. In the most serious cases this has potential to include unlimited fines and prison sentences.

Reduce Claims: Accidents and incidents can lead to more claims which in turn can affect premiums and excess payments.

Reputational: Any adverse health and safety incident or prosecution can result in negative reputational impact.

Communications

15. The annual report will be published internally and externally and presented to Audit and Governance Committee.

Report by: Vic Kurzeja, Director of Property & Assets

Annex: The Annual H&S Report 2024-25

Background papers: None

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