

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
21ST SEPTEMBER 2022

HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2021/22

Report by CLAIRE TAYLOR, CORPORATE DIRECTOR CODR

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to Note the [Health & Safety Annual Report 2021/22](#) as approved by the Senior Leadership Team.**

Executive Summary

2. This annual report contains information about the work of the Corporate Health and Safety Team, the Council's health and safety performance over the year 2021/22 and its plans for 2022/23.

H&S Issues during 2021/22

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. Throughout 2021/2022 there has been considerable focus by the H&S Team on the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and safe continuity of services. We have worked closely with managers to ensure risk assessments are carried out and safe systems of work remain robust to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission to our workforce and service users. Whilst there were operational challenges due to localised outbreaks amongst staff groups overall controls remained effective in reducing the impact of infections with continuity of essential services being maintained.
5. The health risks to the population from COVID-19 are now significantly reduced, which is primarily due to the success of the vaccination programme. In line with the governments Living with Covid Plan, the future approach to managing the risk of COVID-19 will broadly be the same as for other respiratory diseases. Staff will be expected to follow public health advice and sickness absence policies, whilst maintaining standard infection prevention control measures at work. There is no longer a requirement to undertake specific risk assessments for COVID-19 and workplace asymptomatic testing has ended, other than for a few specified circumstances in health and adult social care.
6. Whilst the pandemic has taken the significant resource and focus of the H&S Team, we have sought to continue with improvements in all areas of risk management. One of these has been personal safety and lone working with

many of our staff who work in frontline roles and are sometimes exposed to physical and verbal abuse including violent, threatening, or aggressive behaviours. With staff now operating in a more agile way we recognised traditional office-based working and duty phones were unreliable and so we have purchased a lone work worker mobile solution which enable staff to have access to 24/7 emergency support and provide assurance to managers that staff are safe.

7. Looking forward the organisation has seen a significant shift in work styles to a more agile and hybrid style. This approach has clear benefits for both the organisation and staff and work is underway to develop a long-term strategy for new ways of working. In the meantime, it is important that staff can work in a safe manner whether at home or in the office. The H&S Team continues to support managers alongside ICT, HR, FM and Procurement to ensure staff have access to the right equipment and where appropriate making reasonable adjustments for those with special requirements.
8. The pandemic and government restrictions resulted in a significant impact on services operationally and how staff conduct their work. Unsurprisingly this has had a positive effect on our accident and incident rates which have shown a consistent reduction over this period. We are predicting for 2022/23 an uptick in rates attributable to restrictions being lifted and frontline activity returning to normal.

H&S Priorities for 2022/23

9. As we move through 2022/23 there will be renewed focus on business as usual and core service risk whilst ensuring the organisation continues to build on the successful COVID-19 response and lessons learned to ensure continuous improvement.
10. The Health and Safety Assurance Board continue to review our strategic H&S Objectives and despite the unprecedented challenges faced responding to the Covid-19 pandemic over the last 2 years, we have remained focused on delivering those priorities which are:
 - (a) Improve corporate assurance of H&S in fleet management (One Fleet)
 - (b) Monitor compliance
 - (c) Improve system for reporting safety events
 - (d) Engage with Trade Unions on H&S matters
 - (e) Provide safe and compliant buildings (including Schools)
 - (f) Competent workforce
 - (g) Implement the Lone Worker Monitoring App/Device for staff who are working in higher risk situations (Adult Services priority for 2022/23).

Corporate Policies and Priorities

11. By ensuring the Council is compliant with relevant legislation and services are delivered safely we are protecting our workforce and **Prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents.**

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications associated with this report. There may be future financial implications in respect of the priorities for 2022/23 (i.e., lone worker solution and reporting system improvements) although these will be identified and approved through the project management process.

Legal Implications

13. This report demonstrates the Council's is meeting its duties under Health and Safety Legislation, specifically Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAWA) 1974, **imposes duties on the employer towards his employees.** Section 2 (1), states that ' it shall be the duty of every employer to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare at work of all its employees"

Staff Implications

14. There are no staffing implications as direct result of this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

15. 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

16. There are no sustainability implications as direct result of this report.

Risk Management

17. The Council must ensure it has robust systems of internal control, covering health and safety. By reporting on H&S performance the Committee 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.

Claire Taylor
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Annex: ANNEX Annual H&S Report 2021/22

Background papers: Nil

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September 2022