

Health & Safety

Annual Report 2024/25

Contents

2	Introduction
3	Creating our safety culture
4	Transforming health and safety support
5	Workplace health
6	Mental health and wellbeing in the Fire Service
7	Preventing hand-arm vibration syndrome
8	Protection against noise damage
9	Looking after little digits
10	Adventure, fun and learning
11	Safer by design
12	Property compliance
13	Fire Service
14	Corporate health and safety training / Peoplesafe lone working app
15	Audits and inspections
16	Accidents and Incidents in Services
17	Accidents and Incidents in Schools
18	Accidents and Incidents in Fire Service (Visor)
19	H&S Action Plan

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council values its employees, service users, pupils and others affected by its operations and is committed to protecting their health, safety and wellbeing. It therefore continues to develop and improve its arrangements for managing health and safety.

This annual report contains information about the work of the Health and Safety Team and functions, the council's health and safety performance over the year and its plans for the coming year.

The Health and Safety Team provides advisory and support services across all the council's services with integrated specialists in high-risk areas.

Creating our safety culture

The [health and safety policy](#) establishes the council's corporate approach to health and safety matters with the latest version approved in 2024.

The policy comprises:

Part 1: Policy statement – sets out the organisation's aims and objectives.

Part 2: Roles and responsibilities – outlines who has specific responsibility for managing health and safety and what they are responsible for.

Part 3: Arrangements – details how risks are managed and will reference risk assessments, procedures, training, consultation and emergency arrangements.

By implementing the health and policy we want to create a safety culture that relates to the council's values and behaviours that will determine our commitment to health and safety management.

Leadership Commitment – Leaders set the tone by actively prioritising and investing in workplace safety.

Employee Involvement – Workers at all levels take ownership of safety and feel responsible for their well-being and that of their colleagues.

Open Communication – Employees feel comfortable reporting hazards, incidents, or safety concerns.

Continuous Learning – Safety training, incident investigations, and lessons learned are integrated into daily operations.

Proactive Approach – The organization actively identifies and mitigates risks before they lead to accidents.

Transforming health and safety support

‘The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 mandates under Regulation 7 that every employer must appoint competent persons to assist them in complying with health and safety legal duties.’



Through organisational redesign, health and safety functions have been consolidated into a single resource reporting to the Head of Property Operations.

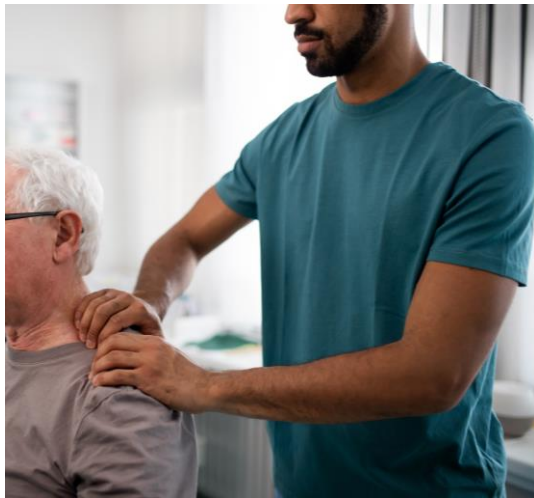
This brings together the corporate, schools and property Health and Safety Teams to provide a more efficient and resilient service.

A wider service review will be carried out during 2025 to ensure we have a robust structure with effective processes that enable:

- Simplification and consolidation of policies, procedures, systems etc. avoiding duplication.
- Improved team resilience and offering career pathways and personal development opportunities.
- Clear strategic oversight and assurance of health and safety across the council.

Workplace health

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) include injuries and conditions that can affect the back, joints and limbs, they are also a common cause of sickness absence. It is important we look after our health and take steps to prevent or reduce the risk of MSD developing. For workers using display screen equipment (DSE) or manual handling this can increase the risk through poor posture or repetitive work.



To promote better health and wellbeing across our workforce we have delivered face-to-face workshops including:

- **DSE Drop-in clinics.** This practical session offers the opportunity for employees to meet an assessor to discuss any problems and learn how to set up equipment to meet their individual requirements.
- **MSK Screening.** These consist of a 'mini-MOT' to assess someone's endurance, flexibility, strength and balance. Employees will be given advice on whether they might be predisposed to developing an MSD.

The aim of these sessions is to provide employees with practical and straightforward advice that reduces the risk of aches and pains, following the ethos that 'prevention is better than cure'.

Mental health and wellbeing in the Fire Service

Fire service personnel are especially vulnerable to mental health issues due to the high levels of stress and trauma they encounter in the line of duty.

It is essential that all firefighters learn how to recognize their own mental-health status and take steps to address any issues.

Unfortunately, these issues remain highly stigmatized, and it can be difficult for individuals to find the help they need.



In 2024-25 the service has:

- Worked to increase awareness & promoted support available.
- Organised “Real Talk Real People” online sessions on Men’s Mental Health and Retirement.
- Managers forums.
- Station Visits to discuss Mental Health.
- 45 Mental Health First Aiders in service.
- Employee Assist Programme (EAP)
- Critical Incident Debriefing (CID) - designed to reduce the effects of stress-related disorders that can occur in personnel who have attended traumatic incidents.
- Firefighters Charity Workshops promoting support available.

Preventing hand-arm vibration syndrome

Hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) causes changes in the sensation of the fingers which can lead to permanent numbness of fingers, muscle weakness and, in some cases, bouts of white finger. It is caused by repeated and frequent working with hand-held vibrating tools, such as power cutters, grinders, chainsaws and pneumatic drills.



HAVS has recently been a target area of enforcement activity by the Health and Safety executive with several recent prosecutions due to poor management controls. Vibration is a particular risk for Fire and Rescue and Countryside services.

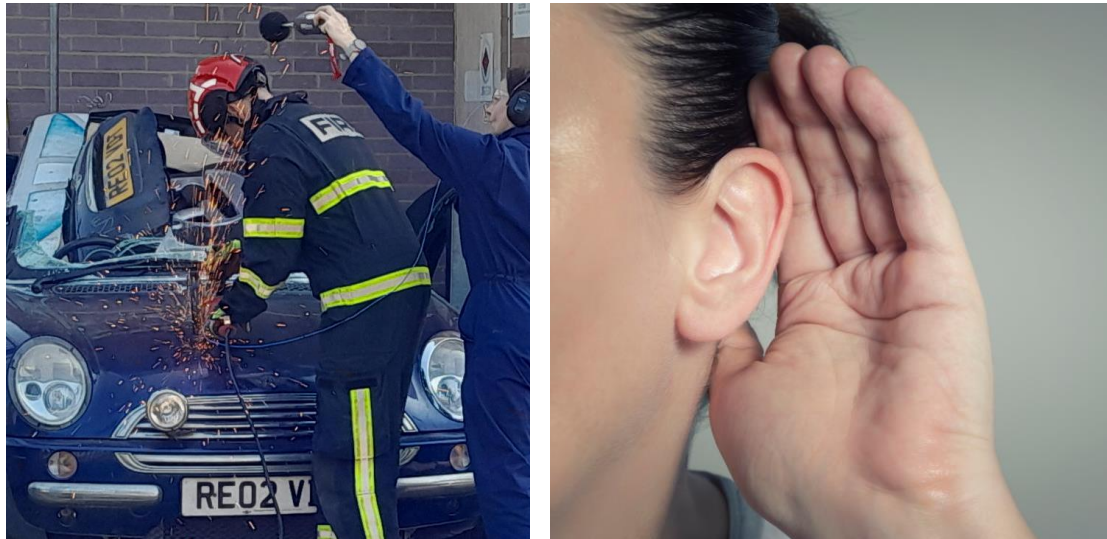
To ensure the council has effective controls in place to protect staff the H&S Team have commissioned specialist testing to measure the vibration of equipment and tools. Testing included rescue and cutting equipment on fire appliances, workshop power tools and countryside maintenance plant.

This work has helped develop a platform for preventing HAVS including:

- Ensuring vibration is considered when purchasing new equipment.
- Increased worker awareness of HAVS and how to protect themselves.
- Implementation of safe systems of work when using equipment to protect workers from the risk of HAVS.
- Prescribed health surveillance and monitoring.

Protection against noise damage

Exposure to high noise levels can cause permanent hearing damage, often without the sufferer being aware of it until it is too late. Noise can be generated by processes and equipment such as powered tools or machinery.



Utilising our inhouse health and safety team we have carried out assessments to measure occupational noise exposure levels.

By identifying hazards, we have worked with services to eliminate or control noise risks including:

- Make sure legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded.
- Supply and use quieter tools and machinery.
- For higher-risk areas, plan and put in place technical and organisational control measures.
- Specify and provide hearing protection.
- Put in place health surveillance (including hearing checks) for those at risk.
- Provide worker information and training on safe working practices.

Looking after little digits

Most finger trapping incidents involve younger children who do not fully recognise the danger that doors and in particular doorjamb represent. Finger entrapment risk is a particular consideration for schools, nurseries and other settings used by young children such as museums, community centres and playgroups.



In Oxfordshire, a primary school pupil sustained partial amputation of their finger after trapping it in a door. The incident was investigated by the council's Health and Safety Team and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) with the aim of identifying preventative measures to prevent similar accidents occurring elsewhere. These measures included ensuring thorough risk assessments are carried out by responsible premises managers to identify any entrapment risks and putting in place physical controls such as installing finger-guards on all doors presenting a higher risk including areas used by early years and key stage 1 pupils.

As the employer responsible for health and safety in community and voluntary controlled schools, the council will continue to highlight the issue of finger entrapment and seek assurance that risk assessments have been completed, this has been included in the school health and safety monitoring form for the current academic year 24/25 and moving forward.

Adventure, fun and learning

Learning outside the classroom helps to bring the curriculum to life, provides deeper subject learning and increases self-confidence. It also helps children and young people develop their risk awareness and prepares them for their future working lives.

Striking the right balance between protecting children and young people from risk and allowing them to learn from educational visits has been a challenge for many schools.



'Well-managed school trips and outdoor activities are great for children. Children won't learn about risk if they're wrapped in cotton wool.' (HSE)

Following a detailed review the council has re-launched its Educational Visits Service to provide comprehensive, affordable and personalised advice, guidance and training to schools in Oxfordshire.

Key features of this service include:

- Appointment of a highly experienced Educational Visits Officer providing schools with expert advice and scrutiny of visits with enhanced risk.
- Access to a new planning portal to assist in risk assessment, approvals, staff certifications and provider assurances.
- Access to the Visit Emergency Support Network (VESN) – 24-hour critical incident support.
- Range of training for school Educational Visit Co-ordinators and visit leaders.

Safer by design

The concept of "safer by design" refers to integrating safety considerations into the design process to prevent accidents and injuries.

By consulting with building users and learning from lived experiences we aim to inform design principles that enhance safety and accessibility.



The **Speedwell House** project provides the opportunity to deliver a modern building with inclusive design at its core. Creating environments that are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or retro-fit. This approach ensures that the building will cater to the diverse needs of everyone, including those with disabilities.

An extensive programme of improvement work has been carried out at **Woodeaton Manor School** to enhance a historical building, so it is inclusive and safe for pupils with SEN. This work has included new security and fencing, fire safety improvements and essential repairs and maintenance.

Recent expansion of **residential accommodation for children in care** has involved designers working with children's services to ensure risks are designed out or reduced. Examples include specification of anti-ligature fittings, anti-vandal doors and fire safety systems designed to reduce risk of misuse.

Property compliance

The council has responsibility for managing and maintaining it's estate to ensure buildings and land are compliant with statutory and regulatory standards. This includes:

- Construction projects (capital and minor works) e.g. new builds, refurbishments, demolition.
- Repairs and maintenance including statutory compliance e.g. fire safety, asbestos, water hygiene, gas, electrical, fixed plant and equipment etc.
- Estates management including health and safety responsibility through leases and licences.



93% statutory compliant across circa 250 sites.

11,000 planned preventative maintenance tasks completed.

Maintaining the council's estate can be challenging and complex. Continuous improvement is key to maintaining legal compliance which has included:

- Self-delivery of fire and security maintenance resulting in financial savings, improved response times, expert oversight where outsourcing tasks may be required and improved compliance with respect to fire safety.
- Development of systems and tools to assist Responsible Premises Managers with day-to-day building management tasks.
- Introduction of 'permit-to work system' to ensure high risk activities (e.g. hot work, working at height etc.) are carried out safely with necessary precautions in place.

Fire and Rescue Service

Peer Audit

In June 2024, the service was subject to a health and safety peer review by several of our health and safety counterparts from across the southeast.

The audit examined the effectiveness of the health and safety management system and performance against specific risk areas.

Improvements and actions from the report are a focus for the team and wider OFRS department heads.



Protecting firefighters from contaminants has been a key risk area for the service including:

- “Clean working principles” implemented on Stations and in Vehicles.
- Zoning in place across service buildings.
- Washroom upgrades
- Six new fire appliances (25 plate) with operational Breathing Apparatus (BA) stored outside of the main cab.
- Installation of mechanical BA washers at strategic locations across the county.
- Provision of personal welfare items to operational employees.

Corporate health and safety training



95% Completion – Introduction to H&S for all employees (Induction eLearning)



↑76% Completion – H&S for managers

Health and safety is part of our essential learning and development programme.

The H&S for managers training has been refreshed and re-launched for 2025. As a virtual classroom session additional capacity has seen an upward trend in completions.

Role or task specific training e.g. asbestos awareness, moving and handling etc. is organised by services.

Peoplesafe lone working app



954 protected users
↑80% take up of 1186 assigned licences



767 alarms raised, all of which were precautionary, tests or accidental
0 triaged alarms required emergency services escalation

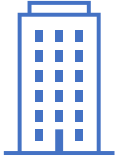


3402 user actions including check-in's

There is a sustained increase in the use of the lone worker mobile application 'Peoplesafe'. The H&S Team continue to promote its use and run regular user workshops and provide face to face support. The app is assigned on a priority basis to those undertaking higher risk lone working such as social workers.

Audits and inspections

Corporate



Corporate health and safety audits were carried out in the following service areas:

- Children's homes and residential services
- Children and family centres
- Countryside services
- Libraries

As qualitative audits these aim to provide a general overview of health and safety effectiveness whilst examining key risk areas. The audit will highlight organisational as well as service specific issues.



Target areas for improvement

Common themes or significant findings highlighted improvements in the following areas:

- Identifying and ensuring role specific training is carried out.
- Risk Assessment – ensuring they are suitable and sufficient and sharing across service and teams to improve consistency of practice.

Schools



204 school H&S monitoring visits in AY 23/24
128 to maintained schools



Overall, a **good level of H&S performance** across maintained schools with only 1 primary school with less than 85% compliance.

Number of Schools	Compliance % score	Compliance rating
111	95%+	Good
16	85%-94%	Some areas need improvement
1	Less than 85% compliant	Significant issues – requires improvement



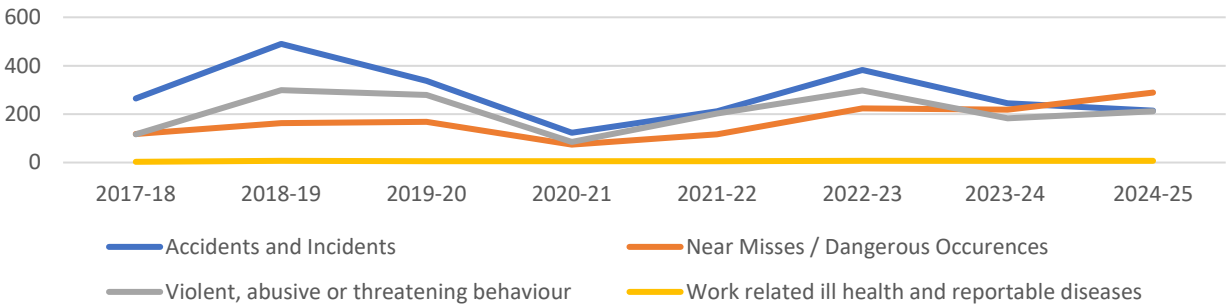
Target areas for improvement

Results indicate support required for schools in the following areas to improve compliance:

- Critical Incident and Emergency Planning
- Driving at work
- Water hygiene management
- Asbestos management

Accidents and incidents - services

Total number of reports by incident type – Long term view



	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Accidents and Incidents	265	490	337	123	212	382	245	214
Near Misses / Dangerous Occurrences	118	163	168	74	117	224	218	289
Violent, abusive or threatening behaviour	116	299	279	85	202	298	182	212
Work related ill health and reportable diseases	3	7	5	5	5	7	7	7
Total	502	959	789	287	536	911	652	722



The total number of **accidents and incidents** has fallen 13% from the previous year.

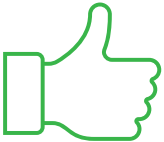
The main causes of accidents are 1) **slips, trips and falls** 2) colliding with fixed objects 3) cuts/puncture injuries. **51% of injured persons are employees.**



The total number of **reports of violent, abusive or threatening behaviour** has increased 16% from the previous year.



Services that reported the most incidents were adult social care (32%), libraries (24%) and children's social care (23%).



Near miss reporting has increased by 33%. Near miss reporting is a positive indicator as it helps identify potential hazards before they cause harm, allowing preventative measures to be put in place.



Community Support Services, libraries and children's residential services were the top reporters of near misses. These services are commended for their positive attitude to reporting in general as well as their proactive approach to recognising near misses which demonstrate proactively trying to prevent future accidents.



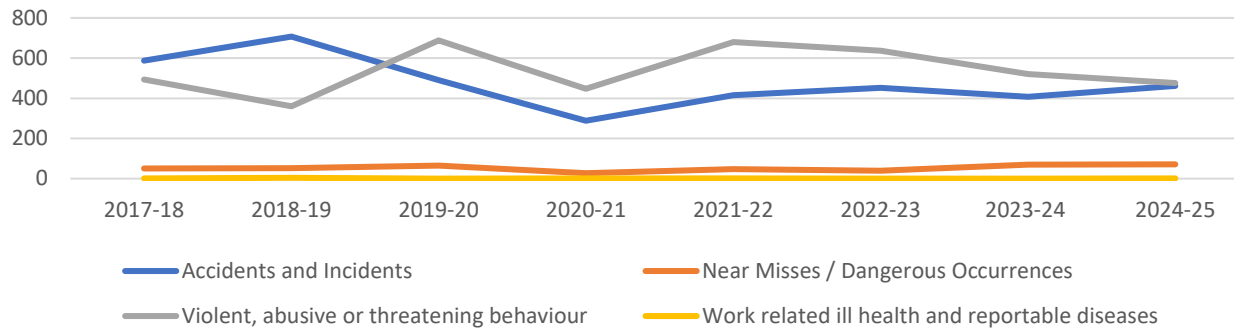
There were **7 RIDDOR** reports notified to HSE:

- 3 specified injuries to employees e.g. fractures.
- 2 injuries resulting in employees off work for more than 7 days.
- 2 service users taken to hospital from scene of accident.

Power BI analytics and data is restricted
To request access permissions, contact the H&S Team

Accidents and incidents - schools

Maintained Schools - total number of reports by incident type



	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Accidents and Incidents	587	707	490	288	415	452	408	462
Near Misses / Dangerous Occurrences	50	52	65	27	47	40	70	71
Violent, abusive or threatening behaviour	494	360	688	447	679	637	521	475
Work related ill health and reportable diseases	1	4	0	1	1	0	0	1
Total	1132	1123	1243	763	1142	1129	999	1009



The total number of **accidents and incidents** has **increased** 13% from the previous year.

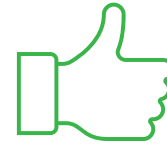
The main causes of accidents are 1) **slips, trips and falls** 2) colliding with fixed objects 3) Fall from height. **76% of injured persons are pupils.**



The total number of **reports of violent, abusive or threatening behaviour** has **decreased** 9% from the previous year.



From a total of 1009 reports made by circa 120 maintained schools 29% of reports were made by 3 special schools.



A significant proportion of accidents in primary school happened whilst pupils were using play equipment. Whilst most of these accidents are minor, some-particularly those involving climbing equipment, result in more serious injuries including fractures.



There were **60 RIDDOR** reports notified to HSE mainly involving pupils who sustained fractures or required hospital treatment.



A notice of contravention was served by the HSE in relation to a door entrapment incident where a pupil sustained partial amputation of their finger. Corrective measures have been put in place and no further action is being taken as a result.

Power BI analytics and data is restricted
To request access permissions, contact the H&S Team

Accidents and incidents – fire and rescue

Financial Year	24/25				
Safety Event Type	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Injury	12	13	10	16	51
Near Miss	13	9	7	7	36
Occupational Ill Health				2	2
Unsafe Condition	2	8	4	3	17
Vehicle Incident	3	14	12	9	38
Total	30	44	33	37	144



The total number of **accidents and incidents** has **increased** 13% from the previous year.

The main causes of accidents are **slips, trips and falls** and **manual handling** including sprains, strains and twists.

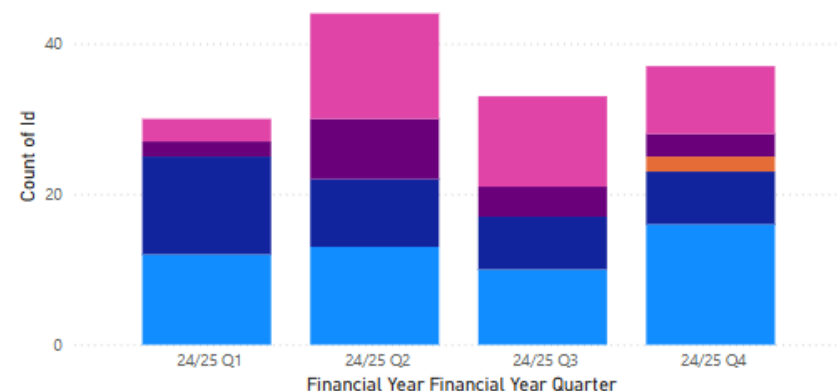
Financial Year	24/25			
RIDDOR Type	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	2		1	
Biological Agents (Covid)				1
Breathing apparatus		1	1	2
Non-fatal accidents to non-workers				1
Over-seven-days injury	4	2	3	3
Specified injuries to worker	1	1	1	
Total	7	4	6	7



There were **24 RIDDOR** reports notified to HSE of which 12 due to over 7-day injuries and 4 relating to **Breathing Apparatus**.

Number of Investigations by Safety Event Type

Safety Event Type ● Injury ● Near Miss ● Occupational Ill Health ● Unsafe Condition ● Vehicle Incident



Power BI analytics and data is restricted
To request access permissions, contact the H&S Team

H&S Action Plan

The H&S Action Plan will set out how the council plans to improve health and safety standards. This creates a focus and demonstrates our commitment to continual improvement.
The actions will be relevant to our strategic themes and be practical steps for improvement.
Progress is monitored by the Health and Safety Assurance Board and reported to Senior Leadership Team.

Leadership	Review of H&S Assurance Board	<p>The H&S Assurance Board is key element of our governance framework and involvement by senior managers and key individuals is integral to its success. This involves not only understanding the current state of H&S within the organisation but also actively championing initiatives that promote a culture of safety and wellbeing.</p> <p>Action: The Director of Property (Corp Lead for H&S) will lead a review to ensure the board has clear direction, purpose and attendees.</p>
Leadership	Review of H&S Team resourcing	<p>There is a need to enable efficiencies ensuring a risk focused approach, building on strengths through improved collaborative working. The H&S functions have been brought together into a single resource within Property and Assets.</p> <p>Action: Restructure of the H&S Team will be carried out 25/26.</p>
Risk Management	H&S policies and procedures	<p>It is essential that everyone has access to up-to-date H&S information including policies, procedures and guidance.</p> <p>Action: Key H&S policies and procedures being reviewed during 25/26 including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving for Work – in collaboration with HR and Vehicle Management Service • Fire Safety – in collaboration with Property Services • Risk Assessment <p>Action: As a traded service, all schools H&S information will be reviewed and transferred to the secure SLA online platform.</p>
Risk Management	Risk assessment	<p>Monitoring and engagement with services has identified differences in risk assessment. Whilst assessing risks appears to be in line with statutory guidance, various forms and tools are being used by different service areas.</p> <p>Action: A small project will look at options to improve risk assessment across the organisation including systems to track completion and provide assurance.</p>
People	Wellbeing	<p>Under H&S legislation there is a legal duty to protect workers from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it. Stress is a significant cause of sickness absence.</p> <p>Action: Support delivery of the HR and Culture Change Wellbeing project with a vision to develop a holistic approach that improves individual wellbeing, organisational performance, and employee satisfaction.</p>
People	MSK and manual handling	<p>Ill health due to Musculoskeletal (MSK) injuries is a significant cause of sickness absence.</p> <p>Action: Following on from the work around use of Display Screen Equipment the H&S Team will target activities where there is increased risk from manual handling such as library service logistics and supported transport.</p>

People	Role specific H&S training	<p>Corporate H&S Audits have highlighted a varied approach to managing role specific training. Some of this training is outside the scope of the corporate programme and organised by individual services/teams.</p> <p>Action: The H&S Team will issue guidance to managers on how to identify H&S training needs and share best practice where service/teams have systems in place to track status and completions.</p>
People	Accidents, incidents and near misses	<p>Prevention is better than cure. Near miss reporting is important so you we can deal with the hazard before anyone gets hurt.</p> <p>Action: will be promoting the need for reporting 'near-misses' which helps in raising awareness and preventing and mitigating accidents. We want to encourage a more proactive approach that encourages people to report any near-misses and use the information from incidents to review risk assessments and control methods. By doing this, we could prevent accidents before they occur.</p>
Place	Safe and compliant buildings	<p>Responsible Premises Managers (RPMs) are usually appointed by services to act as the person responsible for the day-to-day running of a building. They play a crucial role as the main point of contact for Property Services and carryout tasks such as reporting damage or faults, ensuring local emergency procedures are in place including fire and first aid and undertaking routine compliance tasks such as testing the fire alarm.</p> <p>Action: Working with Property Services the H&S Team will further develop systems and tools to enable RPMs to carryout these responsibilities efficiently and accurately including the launch of a new reporting routine tasks reporting app, improving the RPM monthly communication forum to share learning and best practice. A review to identify RPM training needs and information will also be carried out to ensure competence in this role.</p>
Place	Property compliance	<p>Our Property Services function acts to manage and maintain all the buildings and land that are needed for council services.</p> <p>Action: Following the success of inhouse fire system engineers Property Services have recognised the benefits of self-delivery to deliver maintenance to the properties and will continue to adopt this providing further advances in best value and compliance. The team are looking to bring all aspects of electrical maintenance from Fixed wire testing and PAT testing to installations supporting minor works where feasible.</p>
Learning and improving	Corporate H&S audit programme	<p>The Corporate Health and Safety Team undertake a programme of health and safety audits and inspections to check that preventative and protective control measures are implemented and effective.</p> <p>Action: A range of H&S Audits and inspections will be carried out during 25/26 to assess compliance.</p>
Learning and improving	Schools H&S annual monitoring	<p>The council has H&S responsibility for controlled, voluntary controlled and community schools. To provide assurance that school leaders and Governing Bodies are compliant and meeting their responsibilities using their devolved powers the council will undertake annual inspections as part of its schools traded service.</p> <p>Action: The H&S Team will review the current monitoring process for 25/26 to ensure it covers key areas of risk.</p>
Learning and Improving	Property contractor assurance	<p>Steps are being taken to monitor contractor performance for H&S.</p> <p>Action: A new Property Contractor Audit Programme has been created and will be further imbedded in 25/26.</p>



Health and Safety Team

Email: healthandsafety@oxfordshire.gov.uk