

ANNUAL REPORT ON HEALTH & SAFETY PERFORMANCE 2008-2009 AND FUTURE PLANS

1. Introduction

This report is summary of the Council's health and safety performance corporately during the year 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.

2. Background

Health and safety at work is a major part of the governance arrangements of the Council, due to the statutory nature of many of the duties. Within the area of risk management, of all the everyday risks that are faced, health and safety probably has the highest potential for loss, in terms of money, reputation and service capability.

The Council takes sensible measures to protect workers and service users from death, injury and disease whilst still allowing enterprise, initiative and challenge. In these times of competing priorities the Council must be reasonable and proportionate in its reaction to any situation and use risk assessment and then evaluation to influence decisions.

The national picture of health and safety is improving year on year, but is still not as good as it could be. There are over two hundred workers killed every year in the UK and over a hundred members of the public killed during work activities. The UK is among the best countries in the world at protecting people, but many of the incidents which happen are easily preventable with a little forethought and effort.

3. Significant Risks faced by Employees at Work

In any one year there are typically more than 500 accidents reported by employees arising from some aspect of their work activities (see Appendix 1). The focus is on areas of the most significant risk if the likelihood of future accidents is to be reduced.

The total number of incidents has risen this year. However, this can be accounted for as a result of better reporting procedures in Educational Services and Community Services. Work is ongoing to rationalise the reporting system in order to better define accident types. This will also allow better benchmarking with other authorities.

The most significant risks to employees as measured by the frequency of reported accidents in 2008/09 are:-

(i) Incidents of Violence and Aggression

These account for approximately half of all reported incidents (it should be noted that the majority of these incidents are within the ASN sector of Educational Services and within the Care sector of Community Services).

(ii) Falls

Is one of the next two biggest areas of significant risk.

(iii) Manual Handling

Is the next significant risk.

4. Strategies and Systems in place to control Significant Risks faced by employees

(i) Incidents of violence and aggression

Community Services. All incident reports are reviewed by Senior Managers.

A person specific risk assessment system implemented in many parts of Community Care and Children and Families. Audits are carried out to check compliance and work underway to bring all teams to same high standard.

Training for staff in dealing with challenging behaviour in learning disability and Mental health teams aligned with NHS due to joint working. Training is being phased in across all other teams by the Community Services training team.

Educational Services. All incidents are reviewed by Senior Managers. Meetings held monthly to discuss problem areas and provide help when required.

Risk assessment systems in place in some schools. Training is being developed between health and safety staff and ASN staff to be delivered at the ASG level.

Training in methods of dealing with challenging behaviour currently under review. Courses on offer to deal with class management and awareness of Autism. Courses on physical intervention being offered on a needs basis as it is felt that one system will not satisfy all the situations encountered.

(ii) Falls

Policy work has been carried out on falls from heights for all departments. A risk assessment system for decision making about safe access has been implemented in some DLO's. Better access methods available within Housing DLO.

New methods have been employed in schools for annual stripping of wooden floors to eliminate potential for multiple slip injuries.

Slip resistant flooring has been laid in catering establishments.

(iii) Manual Handling

A risk assessment system is in place across community care and all homecarers are trained in safe handling.

All DLO's and DSO's have a system of risk assessment and training provision in place.

5. Review of Policy and development work.

(i) Health and Safety Goals

A complete overhaul of the Health and Safety Management System, which was first introduced in 1999, is currently underway. Revised procedures in the areas of Violence and Aggression; Computer Use; Driving; Work at Heights; and Emergency Action Procedures have all been implemented over the last twelve months. In coming months, a self assessment audit backed by focused specific topic visits will give the Council a better picture of how well each department, section or establishment is managing the risks they face or create.

(ii) New Health & Safety Policy Statement

The service plan for this year has at its core the development and communication of a new Health and Safety policy statement. This is the "vision statement" from the leaders of the organisation. It is generally accepted that it is good to have a simple and accessible document without legal jargon or too many exclusions which all staff can buy into. The Council is also committed to ensuring that procedures and practices surrounding procurement of goods and services have health and safety matters built in to them. A commitment has also been made to review the system for dealing with accidents or dangerous occurrences.

(iii) Improving Reporting and Investigation System

The current accident report and investigation system could be improved and this will be achieved by a range of measures including the development of a better reporting system, a simpler procedure, more practical training sessions and direct action where poor practice is identified.

The HSE strategy "Be part of the solution" was launched earlier this year and the actions that the Council is taking are in line with this national drive to integrate health and safety into the everyday running of an organisation. An extract from this strategy reads :-

"To be truly effective, health and safety has to be an everyday process supported by all as an integral part of workplace culture"

There is a drive nationally to position health and safety as a critical part of an efficient "best value" culture, as opposed to it being seen as a hindrance and a "bolt-on extra". The Council needs to be proactive in its approach to the risks it creates and through risk assessment, ensure that where possible risk is eliminated, minimised or controlled, and sometimes even tolerated.

In the next annual report, in addition to the incident data, information will be provided on how each department is performing in terms of implementation of the Health and Safety Management Systems.

(iv) Health and safety audits

A self assessment audit has been carried out within Community Services. The Health and Safety team have now been tasked to work with the service to develop an improvement plan and a support package for managers and staff. Similar audits will be carried out in the other departments of the council.