

AGENDA ITEM NO.

WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of Joint School Health & Safety Forum

Wednesday, 9 October 2002

Present:

Elizabeth Green, ATL
Jennifer Collier, ATL
Mark Brotherton, NAEIAC
Carol Thompson, NASUWT
Gillian Harwood, NAHT
Jeff Nettleton, UNISON
Sue Ivey, PHF
Chris Trimby, WASSH

Bob Wolfson, Director for CEL
Stephanie Denovan, Asst. Director, CEL
Paul Collyer, Health & Safety Manager
Kevin Oliver, Health & Safety Adviser
Judy Neville, Insurance & Risk Manager
Win Huggett, Occupational Health Nurse
Maxine Gibson, PSS, CEL
John Murray, P&R, CEL
John Croft, SIS, CEL

Apologies:

Mike Saxby, UNISON
Mike Millard, WAG
Andrew Madgett, NUT
Mike Harrison, NUT

Copies to:

Peter Wallis, UNISON
Malcolm Trobe, SHA
Simon Franklin, Salisbury Diocesan
Betty Davidson, CSD

1. Introduction and Aims of the Forum

Bob Wolfson welcomed everybody to this inaugural meeting. The professional advisers to the group introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of their roles.

Bob then explained that this new consultative body had been set up to provide all sectors of the school service with the opportunity to influence LEA direction on health and safety issues. He encouraged full participation from everyone.

2. Adoption of Draft Constitution

Bob Wolfson asked if there were any comments on the draft Constitution previously circulated. The only amendments were to the terminology of some postholders and bodies. The amended constitution is attached to these minutes.

ACTION: Paul Collyer to make amendments and re-distribute with minutes.

3. New DfES Guidance on Outdoor Educational Visits

A briefing paper had been provided giving the background to this issue and proposing the LEA's response. Bob Wolfson explained that Members were extremely anxious that opportunities for young people should not be curtailed and that the LEA's objective should be

to enhance the confidence of those leading and participating in educational visits in respect of health and safety standards.

Paul Collyer explained that health and safety standards for educational visits by schools in Wiltshire were self-regulatory. The LEA is only involved on request for advice or in the investigation of reported accidents. The new DfES guidance calls for LEAs to take a more proactive role in the management of educational visits generally and to specifically pre-authorise what are known as Category C activities. These are visits with a residential, foreign or adventure activity element.

Additionally each school is to have an educational visit co-ordinator (EVC) whose role will be to advise on the planning arrangements for visits and to assess the competencies of leaders and supervisors. The LEA has been given a one-off grant of £25,900 to provide training to EVCs and LEA officers.

A register of staff leading and supervising educational visits needs to be compiled and maintained. The competency of staff to fulfil these roles will need to be assessed in order to gain registration. The standard required would either be based on national bodies' qualifications or on criteria set by the LEA. The number of staff requiring registration will be huge and this might make the task of compilation impractical to do from a central LEA point. An alternative method would be for schools to compile individual registers of competent persons and for the LEA to take a monitoring role.

None of this guidance is mandatory but it would be used as the benchmark of good practice by the courts. The LEA is also only technically responsible for its implementation within Community and Voluntary Controlled schools where it holds the employers' responsibilities under health and safety legislation. It is normal practice however for the LEA to make all health and safety advice and services available to all schools irrespective of status.

The Forum then debated the issues. The main concerns raised were that:

- some schools would be disinclined to undertake as many trips as they might previously have done because of the concerns about keeping children safe and the legal consequences;
- schools might also restrict visits to those where the venue provides the activities;
- the EVC role would in many instances fall upon the Headteacher and be viewed as a further bureaucratic burden;
- delays in processing requests for visits might create inconvenience and incur costs.

However the general consensus was that the introduction of the specific proposals and the wider guidance produced by the DfES would enhance the confidence of those planning and undertaking educational visits.

ACTION: Bob Wolfson to implement proposals.

4. Arrangements for safety critical maintenance in schools

A briefing paper had been provided giving the background to this issue and proposing the LEA's response. Paul Collyer explained that routine safety maintenance necessary in schools for certain pieces of plant and equipment was undertaken in any of three ways. All schools have delegated budgets for the purpose. Some schools 'buy-back' a maintenance service through the County Council's property contractor, Parkman Property Services (PPS). Some schools choose not to 'buy-back', electing instead to take on the role of organising

maintenance themselves. Some schools, which are not given the option of 'buying-back' by virtue of their status, arrange service level agreements with PPS to organise some of the maintenance of their behalf.

Where schools buy back through Parkman, the LEA can have confidence that the appropriate maintenance is being carried out. There is an information gap though in respect of other schools. This may mean that in some instances, some safety critical maintenance may not be up-to-date. It seems unlikely that any school would wilfully neglect important maintenance and so it might be a genuine lack of understanding about the actions to be taken which would lead a school to be behind with its schedule.

To address these issues the LEA had made a series of proposals in the briefing paper.

The Forum then debated the issues. The main points raised were:

- In what format would evidence of maintenance be sought? It was agreed that a signed statement of action would suffice although this would be supported by some on-site monitoring for C and VC schools.
- Did the LEA have the authority to impose sanctions against schools unable to provide evidence of adequate maintenance? It was confirmed that it does have the authority under Section 6.2.4 of the existing Scheme for Funding Schools.

ACTION: Bob Wolfson to implement proposals.

5. Forthcoming inspection by the Health and Safety Executive

A briefing paper had been provided giving the background to this issue. Paul Collyer reported that the Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive would be carrying out a small scale intervention within Wiltshire LEA. He explained briefly that the intervention would initially consist of an interview with the Director and visits to 6 schools (this has since been modified by the HSE to 9 schools). He also gave details of the issues that the HSE has indicated particular interest in. They are, in the context of how the LEA manages the risks under fair funding:

- Asbestos
- Legionella
- Manual handling of pupils
- Vehicular traffic on school sites
- Working at height

ACTION: Paul Collyer to report back to the next meeting.

6. Dates of next meetings

12th February 2003, 1100-1300, Willow Room, Conference Centre, County Hall.

15th October 2003, 1100-1300, Willow Room, Conference Centre, County Hall.

All members are requested to note both dates. Suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting should be sent to Paul Collyer, Corporate Services, County Hall BA14 8JN before 28/1/03.