

**Wiltshire Council**

**Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

**27 November 2024**

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**Health and Safety Improvement Programme**

**Executive summary**

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Health and Safety Improvement Programme that has commenced.

**Proposal**

That the committee comment/feedback on the Health and Safety Improvement Programme and proposals in the report.

To provide an update to the Committee in 6 months.

**James Barrah, Director of Assets**

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## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee**

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## **Health and Safety Improvement Programme**

### **Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Corporate Health and Safety Improvement programme, the progress made since the programme initiated and ongoing actions that the Health and Safety Service are intending on performing.

### **Background**

2. Wiltshire Council is a high profile, dynamic organisation with an ambition to be exemplar with respect to health and safety. With a diverse range of responsibilities, the organisation is obliged to prioritise health and safety of their employees, contractors, residents and visitors.
3. In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act etc (1974), and associated regulations, the organisation is required to provide a safe working environment. This is achieved by having a robust health and safety management system which can assess the organisational wide effectiveness of the management and compliance of its activities.
4. Failure to adequately identify, manage and control health and safety risks can potentially lead to death or serious injury, corporate as well as individual criminal & civil litigation, poor productivity, poor staff morale, high staff turnover and significant reputational damage.
5. Everyone must strive and commit to developing, educating and empowering our employees to achieve the highest possible standards of health and safety, a safe working environment and a positive safety culture.
6. The retirement of the postholder of Head of Occupational Health and Safety in April 2024, signalled the timely opportunity to review the service.
7. Due to the synergies between health and safety and landlord compliance, the Health and Safety and Occupational Health services were divided and the Health and Safety Service moved into the Assets Directorate.
8. Following the appointment of Interim Head of Health and Safety, a review of the Health and Safety service was performed.

## **Main considerations for the committee**

9. A review of the service identified the requirement to update and refresh the health and safety management system imbedded across the organisation to ensure that we have self-awareness of how the organisation is performing and can provide assurance with respect to its compliance.
10. To enable the Health and Safety Service to begin to build the foundations of the new management system, the following priorities have been identified:
  - a. Updated Governance
  - b. Health and Safety digital platform
  - c. Review of policies and procedures
  - d. Highest risk areas – personal safety and building/construction
  - e. Training and competency of employees
  - f. Organisational communications and profile
11. Looking at each priority, this report will highlight the outcome of the review, what action has been taken thus far, and what action the Health and Safety Service intend on taking.

### **Updated Governance**

12. It was identified that the health and safety governance across the organisation required updating to ensure that an overarching view of the Council's health and safety function and activities are achieved.
13. To make certain that there is a strong governance system across the organisation, which can monitor performance and provide assurance, a new Governance and Accountability Structure has been developed (appendix 1).
14. A Strategic Health and Safety Board (SHSB) has been created. The SHSB will be chaired by the Chief Executive Officer (or delegated to an appropriate officer) and senior leaders and/or managers representing their directorates will be in attendance. The role and responsibility of the SHSB are laid out in the Terms of Reference (appendix 2).
15. As the health and safety activity, risks and operational requirements can significantly differ across services, it is proposed that Directorate Operational Health and Safety Committees will be created. These committees will review and scrutinise individual service's performance with respect to fulfilling their health and safety obligations and can escalate risks, updates and recommendations to the SHSB.
16. In addition, for the highest risks areas, it is proposed that specific steering groups (such as Personal Safety, Building and Construction Safety) are created, with representatives from services across the organisation to review risks and control measures associated with that activity. It is the role of the steering groups to ensure compliance with policies, sharing of best practices and make recommendations to higher committees or the SHSB.

## **Health and Safety digital platform**

17. The Health and Safety service perform an audit and monitoring function which involves attending all assets and employer-maintained schools and assessing the service's compliance with relevant health and safety legislation and regulations. An action plan is developed after each audit, where tasks are assigned to the service or school to improve their compliance and performance with respect to their health and safety responsibilities.
18. A management responsibility is to ensure that their services have appropriate risk assessments for specific activities where there's identified risks, and these are cascaded and understood by employees. It was established that all risk assessments are saved locally by individual services.
19. With respect to accident and near miss reporting, the Council currently utilise an in-house developed platform for all employees to submit accident and near miss reports, and managers to provide a report following their investigation. Extracting data and reporting from this platform is extremely difficult.
20. The current systems in place to manage the activities set out in paragraphs 18 to 20, are a mix of paper-based and online forms
21. To promote consistency across the organisation and consolidate all health and safety activity, the Health and Safety Service are procuring an online digital platform that can replace the above systems. This platform can deliver a centralised system to capture all the above activities, provide accurate real-time data, promote identification of risks, performance and provide assurances to the SHSB and relevant committees.

## **Review of policies and procedures**

22. Following a review of the Council's health and safety related policies and procedures, it has been identified that many would benefit from being refreshed and updated. The review of these documents will form part of the Health and Safety Improvement Programme.
23. As the Corporate Health and Safety Policy is the overarching policy for the organisation and was due to be reviewed in September 2024, this was prioritised.
24. A review has been performed and whilst the principles of the revised proposed policy are not too dissimilar, the following changes have been made –
  - a. **Reformat of policy** - The Corporate Health and Safety Policy has been separated into three separate documents: Statement of Intent (appendix 3), Roles and Responsibilities and Governance and Accountability Structure.
  - b. **Review of roles and responsibilities** - The proposed Roles and Responsibilities (appendix 4) are not too dissimilar to the existing section of the Corporate Policy however, it was an opportunity to remove or reduce any ambiguity with respect particular phrases that

were used. The purpose of this document is to ensure that there is clear delegation of responsibility across the organisation and everyone who works towards this policy, clearly understand what their role and responsibility is with respect to health and safety. The consent of a 'Corporate Leadership Team Health and Safety Champion' has been included and it is proposed that the Chief Executive Officer is appointed to demonstrate their commitment to this agenda.

- c. **Inclusion of premises related responsibilities** – The current Corporate Health and Safety Policy needed to be updated and increase the level of detail within the structure and provide more in-depth information for premises related tasks. The current Policy doesn't clearly delegate premises related responsibility, or outline what that responsibility entails, so this has been incorporated to achieve a clear understanding for all.
- d. **Inclusion of Governance and Accountability structure** - The existing Corporate Policy refers to the 'organisation structure for health and safety' however, doesn't clearly detail the overarching governance or the Council's adopted quality assurance framework (Performance and Outcome Group and Board). To ensure we reflect the current governance, these have been included in the newly revised Governance and Accountability Structure (appendix 1).

25. The Proposed new Corporate Health and Safety Policy is currently going through the correct decision-making process for approval, which is anticipated to be achieved by January 2025.

### **Highest risk areas – personal safety and building/construction**

- 26. As part of the review, personal safety and building and construction have been identified as two of the highest risk areas for the organisation therefore, Steering Groups are being initiated as per the new governance arrangements.
- 27. Personal Safety Steering Group has been established and have met to the discuss the organisations responsibility and response to managing personal safety.
- 28. It has been identified that, whilst lone working, employees are reliant on their personal/work mobile phones to adopt a 'buddy systems' or check in / check out. Due to being a large rural county, there's not a guarantee that there's signal across the county which may place staff in a precarious position when they are at risk and unable to seek help.
- 29. Due to the gap in provision, the Health and Safety Service are procuring lone working personal safety devices for lone workers. These devices will have 4G roaming, GPS tracking function, check in and out and a SOS emergency call button. The provider of the devices operates a 24 hour, 7 day a week alarm receiving centre who will answer the emergency call and follow the appropriate escalation process ie ring the police, or call the line manager.

30. It is anticipated that the presence of a device can deter aggressive and hostile behaviour from members of the public, potentially reducing number of incidents. These devices will also allow employees to work and feel safe thereby maintaining their physical and emotional wellbeing.
31. Building and Construction Steering Group is going to be initiated and representatives from services who directly in this area of work will attend. It is intended that the group will review the organisation's compliance with respect to their responsibilities and whether existing control measures are sufficient to mitigate risk.

### **Training and competency of employees**

32. It has been identified that the training and development needs of employees are currently being met by e-learning modules as well as ad-hoc training delivered by the Health and Safety Service and the Organisational Development (OD) team.
33. The Health and Safety Service and OD team are collaboratively working together to review existing learning for employees and exploring ways in which the Council's offer can be enhanced. The OD team are engaging with an existing training provider to deliver new e-learning modules and there's the scope to add additional health and safety modules.
34. As part of the review of the Council's approach to personal safety for employees, the Health and Safety Service and OD team are developing a management and employee instructor lead training courses. It is anticipated that the courses will support management to better understand their responsibilities with respect to personal safety and will provide employees with de-escalation strategies when having to manage heightened emotions from members of the public.
35. Institute of Occupational Health and Safety accredited 'Leading Safely' training is being arranged for to the Extended Leadership Team and Heads of Service to provide leaders and senior managers across the organisation with an overview of understanding good practice, benchmarking performance and shaping the health and safety vision across the organisation.
36. As the Council has responsibilities with regards to the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015, accredited training has been arranged for those employers who work directly with construction related activity to empower those employees to understand their responsibilities with respect to health and safety.

### **Organisational communication and profile**

37. To raise the profile of health and safety across the organisation, the Health and Safety Service will collaboratively work with the OD and People Change service to ensure engaging communications are sent to employees.

38. Appropriate communication and training will be provided to employees with the implementation of the new health and safety platform and the introduction of the revised Health and Safety Policy.
39. A health and safety employee survey has been shared across the organisation and closed in August 2024. The responses from the Survey are going to inform the ongoing development and review of the health and safety service.
40. Once the updated health and safety management system is embedded across the organisation, it is anticipated that awareness of the service and responsibility will be achieved over time.

## **Conclusion**

41. A review of the Council's Health and Safety function across the organisation has identified areas that require updating and priority areas have been established.
42. A Health and Safety - Phase 1 Action Plan has been created to monitor progress of the improvement programme. (appendix 5).
43. It is proposed that the Committee are provided with an update on progress in 6 months.

**James Barra**  
**Director of Assets**

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## **Appendices**

1. Proposed Health and Safety Policy - Governance and Accountability Structure
2. Strategic Health and Safety Board Terms of Reference
3. Proposed Health and Safety Policy – Statement of Intent
4. Proposed Health and Safety Policy – Roles and Responsibilities
5. Health and Safety – Phase 1 Action Plan