

Staff and Pensions Committee

9 September 2024

Our People – Focus on Occupational Health and Safety Annual Review 2023/2024

Recommendations

That the Staff and Pensions Committee:

1. Endorses the Occupational Health and Safety Annual Review 2023/24
2. Supports the Council's proposed Health and Safety key focus areas for 2024/25.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The annual review approach provides the Staff and Pensions Committee with information it requires as well as providing an opportunity to tell our story to a wider audience in terms of celebrating our successes and our journey of continuous improvement.

2. Occupational Health and Safety Summary

- 2.1 Overall, in terms of the Council long-term Health and Safety objectives we have made good progress, particularly in our goal to support and strengthen the Council's Health and Safety culture. We have seen reporting of accidents and incidents go up through better engagement and improved reporting at quarterly leadership meetings, and the number of personal injuries reduced this year. However, this does not mean that the work is complete and as a Council we recognise that any work-related injury or ill health is unacceptable, and we must strive to achieve our aspirational target of zero harm to all our people at work. We aim to continuously develop our management approach to Health and Safety, so everyone feels valued, included, safe, supported, and welcome at Warwickshire County Council.

3. Analysis

- 3.1 The Council continues to develop its approach to the management of Health and Safety, focusing on the longer-term objectives of embedding a positive culture of safety that rewards employees for stopping work that may be unsafe and encourages employees to be aware of, identify and address hazards as soon as they can to avoid potential risks.

- 3.2 The Council's goal is to consistently strive towards a vision zero approach to work-related injuries and causes of ill health that increase employee absences and legal claims. To achieve this objective, the quality and accuracy of the data being captured plays a crucial role in helping identify any areas of increased risk to the Directorates so they can take preventative measures.
- 3.3 This year, the number of significant workforce Reporting of Infections, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) incidents requiring reporting to the Health and Safety Executive decreased from 14 in 2022-23 to 12 in 2023-24, of which 7 were schoolteachers. There were a further 5 RIDDOR reports from non-workforce in schools. All RIDDOR incidents are thoroughly investigated, and all identified control measures are reported to the responsible Directorate leadership teams, Education Services, Head Teachers, and, where applicable, School Governing Bodies.
- 3.4 The number of accidents and incidents reported to the Health and Safety Service went up from 940 in 2022-2023 to 1,327 in 2023-2024. The total includes near misses, personal injuries, non-injury accidents. The figures relate to members of WCC workforce as well as pupils, members of the public, and others affected by the Council's work activities. The Health and Safety service has been encouraging more reporting, and the increased number of 1,327 does not mean the Council necessarily has increased risk or poor safety practices. Instead, increased reporting should be seen as an improvement in the workforce's awareness of risk and the need to report unsafe acts.
- 3.5 The overall number of workforce injuries has decreased from 827 to 765. This includes 484 school workers (teachers), 49 school workers (others working in schools), 183 WCC workers and 49 others (those working on behalf of the Council)
- 3.6 Slips, trips, and falls continue to be the leading cause of injury for workers in WCC which is comparable to the national position and there is a similarly high rate recorded across comparative West Midlands Councils. The figure has increased in WCC from 63 in 2022-23 to 79 in 2023-24. In instances where WCC properties are involved, the Health and Safety service is collaborating with the Facilities management team to raise awareness and reduce potential trip hazards.
- 3.7 Violence against those working in schools remains the leading cause of school-related injuries, making up 325 of the 533 reported injuries in schools. Education Services is supporting school Head Teachers and Governing Bodies with appropriate national and local strategies for ensuring staff safety including for example Pupil Behaviour Management. The Health and Safety service is providing guidance and support to schools on appropriate training and risk assessments to enhance teacher safety whenever practical.

- 3.8 Positive preventative actions were taken to limit any potential injuries from happening after 195 workers reported concerns about unsafe environments or practices as near misses. This included 5 near misses with a high potential for workforce injury that were safely resolved because workers reported them earlier. Some Directorates have more front-line services that interact with the public, and this year there have been more reports of aggression and abuse against staff in the Communities Directorate. The Health and Safety service is continuing to work with these services to identify any causes that may be triggering acts of aggression and to determine whether working practices can be altered to help reduce potential trigger points.
- 3.9 Health and Safety employer liability claim payments totalled £50,000 for 2023-2024. There are still £1,092,000 in liability claims outstanding (claim payments in 2023-2024 may include claims submitted in previous years). Three new employer liability claims were received in the 2023-2024 period. The implementation of measures aimed at reducing the Council's injury rates and enhancing the Health and Safety management systems will assist in reducing the amount of financial penalties incurred for employer liability claims.

4. Looking Forward – Key Focus Areas for 2024/25

- 4.1 The Council will continue to implement the Health and Safety Policy Commitments by doing the following:
- Directors will attend Health and Safety training for Senior Leaders to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities and that the Council remains legally compliant with training requirements.
 - Building the workforce's knowledge of Health and Safety roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities through training programmes and campaigns, so that all the workforce is aware of their role in maintaining a safe work environment.
 - As a result of the GAP analysis develop the ISO:45001 Directorate level activity risk registers to ensure that all risks to the workforce and others are adequately assessed and eliminated, or that any remaining risks are adequately controlled to a safe level.
 - Redesign of our approach to communicating and consulting employees on Health and Safety matters, incorporating a new term of reference to facilitate the reinstatement of the Health and Safety Steering Group. The introduction of safety representatives from the non-managerial workforce will provide an opportunity for workers to discuss and monitor the implementation of Health and Safety policies, work practices, and strategies within WCC.

- Developing a more open culture of communication through regular informal engagement and communication visits to help improve employee risk awareness and encourage increased reporting on matters of Health and Safety.
- Developing collaborative opportunities with management teams to promote safe campaigns that target environment risk awareness, thereby reducing the increase in injuries resulting from slips, trips, and falls. Employee awareness of the surrounding risks and early prevention can help reduce slip, trip, and fall injury rates.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Overall, in terms of the Council's long-term Health and Safety objectives we have made good progress, particularly in our goal to support and strengthen the Council's Health and Safety culture. We have seen reporting of accidents and incidents go up through better engagement and improved reporting at quarterly leadership meetings, and the number of personal injuries reduced this year. However, this does not mean that the work is complete and as a Council we recognise the importance of minimising any work-related injury or ill health and strive to achieve our aspirational target of zero harm to all our people at work. We aim to continuously develop our management approach to Health and Safety, so everyone feels valued, included, safe, supported, and welcome at Warwickshire County Council.
- 5.2 We are committed to ensuring our long-term objectives and supporting services are data driven and targeted through improving our workforce data and communicating with our workforce who are key to making any culture change happen.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 None.

7. Environmental Implications

- 7.1 None.

Appendices

1. Our People – Occupational Health and Safety Annual Review 2023/2024

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