

**CABINET**

**12 OCTOBER 2021**

**ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT: APRIL 2020 TO MARCH 2021**

**Report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services**

**1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 A summary health and safety report is produced for Cabinet every year to review the management of health and safety at work within the Council.
- 1.2 This report refers to the period April 2020 to March 2021.

**2.0 Description of Decision (Recommendations)**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet note the content of the Annual Health and Safety Report: April 2020 to March 2021 and refer the report to Council for information.

**3.0 Background**

- 3.1 This report follows a standard format and summarises Health and Safety achievements, significant health and safety events, incidents reported to the Health & Safety Executive, Council-wide initiatives to improve health and safety performance and confirms future priorities.

**4.0 Health and Safety Priorities and Achievements 2020/21**

**Covid-19**

- 4.1 Towards the end of February and into March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic became pronounced within the UK and Sunderland started to have confirmed cases. A collaborative team effort by many council service areas and partners, led by the Chief Executive, swiftly implemented measures to protect the public and staff within the City of Sunderland.
- 4.2 The Health and Safety team developed many guidance documents, risk assessment templates and procedures to assist managers and staff to work as safely as possible during these challenging times. The primary focus was for those who could work at home to do so and for those that couldn't to have additional controls in place to allow essential tasks to be continued, in line with a comprehensive set of risk assessments and covid secure working arrangements, under a new health and safety code of practice.

- 4.3 During this time government guidance was constantly changing meaning the swiftness of interpreting and developing appropriate guidance for our staff was paramount. As a result, new ways of working have been developed some of which will remain embedded into working practices even when the threat of Covid-19 has reduced or disappeared, and in particular, agile working.
- 4.4 The Health and Safety Team will continue to maintain focus on Covid-19 and will review risk assessments and guidance as and when necessary.

### **Fire Risk Assessment Process**

- 4.5 Due to the unforeseen situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the disruption to normal working practices, the fire risk assessment schedule became impacted. Premises, especially educational settings worked hard to ensure they were Covid secure by minimising external visitors. It was decided to carry out those assessments due via a risk-based approach agreed with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.
- 4.6 This Assurance Review of the fire risk assessment will now be undertaken at least annually and is a dynamic document to be used to assist in the process of maintaining the current fire safety measures and will be supported by trained and competent premises managers/controllers.
- 4.7 This change to process has not diluted or detracted from our responsibilities and obligations under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005 but has responded to the current situation in a pragmatic way.

### **Alcohol and Substance Misuse Testing**

- 4.8 Alcohol and substance misuse testing, was introduced in the Council in August 2019 and has now been adopted within SCAS and TFC. Tests are carried out on the grounds of 'Reasonable Cause' (where an employee is suspected of being under the influence of alcohol or misusing drugs whilst at work).
- 4.9 Within this reporting period (April 2020 to March 2021) there has been an increase in testing where specific concerns were raised or identified; 109 tests were carried out for both alcohol and substances with 3 findings detected.
- 4.10 General feedback from those that took part in the testing was very positive and well received. The 3 cases that had findings detected were followed up with their manager in conjunction with the HR Team.

## **Watch Your Step - Slips, Trips, and Falls Initiative**

- 4.11 February 2020 saw the start of the 'Watch your Step' initiative with articles published in the Safer Times newsletter and other corporate communication briefings. eLearning courses were finalised on the Learning Management System

## **5.0 Significant Health and Safety Incidents during 2020/21**

### **Refuse Collection Vehicle Incident – April 2020**

- 5.1 Whilst a refuse vehicle was turning into a rear lane an incident occurred with a rough sleeper. The incident was reported to the HSE in accordance with RIDDOR requirements.
- 5.2 The HSE made further enquiries into the incident and were assured by the actions taken. Guidance for staff has also been updated as a result of this matter.

### **Injury to a Member of the Public – April 2020**

- 5.3 Following an injury to a member of the public on a bridleway gate a full investigation was carried out with all parties involved to determine why the gate was not locked and to identify responsibility for ongoing maintenance and checks. This was concluded and appropriate action taken.

### **Employee injury – July 2020**

- 5.4 An employee sustained an injury whilst moving a bulky item. The Safe Working Procedure requires use of a sack barrow and tail lift for bulky items such as fridges and freezers.
- 5.5 The matter was investigated and appropriate action taken. Managers were advised to review the provision of lifting aids on all bulky waste collection vehicles. All employees who may carry out bulky refuse collection activities were to undergo a refresher toolbox talk reminding them of the requirement to use lifting aids and tail lifts and all Team Leaders are to monitor employee behaviour and take appropriate action.

### **School Water System – March 2021**

- 5.6 Refurbishment works were carried out in a school which included water pipework.  
After several months of monitoring low water temperature issues, sampling of the water system returned a positive result for legionella bacteria. The decision was taken to close the school a day early of the Easter break as a result.
- 5.7 No cases of Legionnaires disease were reported, however a RIDDOR report was submitted to the HSE as a dangerous occurrence in line with reporting procedures.

- 5.8 A full, complex, and lengthy investigation was carried out. A review of Construction Design Management procedures, contractor vetting processes and notification of works procedures is currently underway to ensure full compliance with CDM 2015 is maintained across all relevant areas.

## **6.0 Health and Safety Enforcement Interventions during 2020/21**

### **Covid-19 arrangements – June 2020**

- 6.1 Following an alert raised by a member of staff, HSE raised a concern regarding the activities undertaken by the Private Sector Housing Team, particularly in relation to vulnerable persons and the controls in place to protect them whilst out visiting properties or other establishments, which their role may require them to visit.
- 6.2 A detailed investigation of the alleged concerns was undertaken and a formal response was provided to the HSE. It was found that appropriate Covid secure working arrangements were in place and there has been no follow up by the HSE.

### **Visits to Houghton and South Hylton Depots – March 2021**

- 6.3 HSE made unannounced visits to Houghton and South Hylton depots following an anonymous alert by a member of staff. A subsequent email received from the Inspector identified areas of concern regarding Traffic Management, Rats/Weils disease and Health Surveillance / Hepatitis of staff.
- 6.4 A detailed investigation and full explanation of operational procedures that are in place as well as planned remedial measures was sent to the HSE Inspector and no further action has been taken.

## **7.0 Council wide Health and Safety initiatives and priorities for 2021/22**

### **Health & Safety Assurance Framework**

- 7.1 The second stage of the Assurance Framework was scheduled for March 2021 however this has been suspended due to the Covid Pandemic. It will be reintroduced at an appropriate time following normal resumption of working arrangements and remains a priority for 2021/22.

### **Watch Your Step - Slips, Trips, and Falls Initiative**

- 7.2 Although the initiative started in the previous reporting period focus shifted towards Covid19 restrictions. It will be reintroduced at an appropriate time.

## **Health and Safety Training for Senior Leaders and managers**

- 7.3 In October and November 2020 an additional 14 senior leaders successfully completed the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) 'Leading Safely' qualification, which is the nationally recognised and accredited training for senior leaders. Further sessions will be rescheduled.
- 7.4 Development has also commenced on a training package for managers which will complement the IOSH Managing Safely courses some managers have already undertaken.

## **Display Screen Equipment (DSE), Home and Agile working**

- 7.5 As we continue home and agile working our DSE management arrangements must be appropriate to support new ways of working.
- 7.6 The existing DSE Code of Practice and eLearning will be updated in line with our new working arrangements. It is anticipated that a robust electronic DSE Management System will be operational in the autumn.

## **Review of the Health and Safety Management System**

- 7.7 Whilst our existing health and safety management system is robust and legally compliant, the Plan-Do-Check-Act principle means that constant review is essential to not only maintain compliance but to go beyond compliance and create an effective health and safety management system which improves our health and safety performance, and improves legislative awareness and compliance.
- 7.8 Following on from the progress within the last reporting period this process has already broadened with work progressing in the more high-risk work environments including City Development and the Port of Sunderland. Work has now started in Neighbourhoods with Environmental Services where a pilot reporting system of automated actions from H&S audits and fire risk assessments is also being developed. Once fully tested this will be implemented in all Directorates and service areas on a phased approach based on risk level. H&S Advisers will also meet with Assistant Directors on at least quarterly basis to assist with development of action plans and closure of actions identified via the reporting dashboards.
- 7.9 The aim is to achieve a balance between the systems and behavioural aspects of health and safety management. It will also continue to embed health and safety awareness as an integral part of the organisational culture and management systems.

## **Premises management and construction design management - CDM**

- 7.10 Current arrangements for premises management including, premises manager/premises controller responsibilities and premises manager guidance are being reviewed.
- 7.11 With regard to CDM a working group is to be established, led by the health and safety manager, with key representatives from relevant services to review our current position, identify and agree changes required to systems, ways of working and documentation across the authority and partner organisations.

## **8.0 Incident Reporting and Statistics**

- 8.1 A total of 975 incidents occurred in 2020/21. Of all major incidents reported, the percentage of incidents that are defined as incidents which are reportable to the HSE under RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) was 7.3% for 2020/21
- 8.2 This figure has increased from last year's (2.3% for 2019/20) due to the requirement to include Covid-19 work related incidents, however, if Covid cases are removed the figure is 3.1% which is more closely aligned to the previous year.

## **9.0 Reason for Decision**

- 9.1 A summary health and safety report is produced for Cabinet every year to provide an overview of the management of health and safety at work within the Council. This report follows a standard format, summarising significant health and safety events, incidents reported to the Health & Safety Executive, Council-wide initiatives to improve the health and safety performance system, confirms future priorities and provides the requisite assurance.

## **10.0 Alternative Options**

- 10.1 There are no alternative options recommended.

## **11.0 Other Relevant Considerations/Consultations**

- (i) **Financial Implications** – Any costs associated with implementing the priority actions identified for 2021/22 can be met from existing revenue budgets, should specific interventions be required then these will be considered at the appropriate time.

- (ii) **Risk Analysis** – It is not considered that a separate risk analysis is necessary. The assessment of risk is inherent in the management of health and safety and the identification of priorities for further action.
- (iii) **Legal Implications** – The provision of an annual report is a key measure in reviewing the management of health and safety at work within the Council and the Council's compliance with its legal obligations in relation to health and safety at work.
- (iv) **Policy Implications** –No additional policy implications have been identified.
- (v) **Implications for Other Services** –All services of the Council have responsibility for ensuring safe working environments and work collaboratively through the management system in place to achieve this.
- (vi) **The Public/External Bodies** – Not applicable.
- (vii) **Project Management Methodology** – Not applicable
- (viii) **Procurement** – Not applicable

## **10. Background Papers**

10.1 Not applicable

