

TITLE	Health and Safety Annual Report 21-22
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 September 2022
WARD	Non-Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Executive - Susan Parsonage, Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The Council has a legal duty to protect the health and safety of employees and other people who come into contact with its undertakings e.g. customers, pupils etc.; the standard set by law requires employers to do what is considered to be 'reasonably practicable'.

The effective management of health and safety is an essential part of good corporate governance. Furthermore, the active management and mitigation of accidents at work is essential, not only to protect people from harm but to also minimise financial loss through employee absences and other direct and indirect related costs.

The legal responsibility and accountability for health and safety lies with the employer, Wokingham Borough Council. In addition to staff working in the services, the Authority is the employer in the case of community and community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nurseries and pupil referral units. In respect of foundation schools, voluntary aided schools, academies and free schools the Governing Body is the employer.

Note: this report does not include the health and safety performance of Wokingham Borough Council wholly owned subsidiaries operating as separate companies as their respective boards monitor and review their own internal health and safety performance.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive notes the internal health and safety performance for 2021-22; and note and agree the priorities in the report described under Corporate Health and Safety Priorities for 2021-22 which will inform the current municipal year 2022-23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Whilst not a statutory report, the preparation and issue of an annual health and safety report by a local authority (a health and safety regulator in its own right) in respect of its own internal health and safety reflects good practice and provides assurance to senior levels of the organisation

In overall terms the health and safety performance during 2021-22 across both the schools and the services workforces could be viewed in a positive light in that the number of serious employee incidents i.e. those that require notification to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) under The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous

Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) remained at a low level with no employee related RIDDOR reportable incidents for either services or schools were noted during the 2021-2022 year.

An additional RIDDOR four notifications were raised to the HSE regarding members of the public attending countryside parks and activities and a pupil who had to be taken to hospital due to an object lodged in their throat after swallowing it. All incidents were investigated, and risk controls established with lessons learnt to prevent recurrences.

Of a total of 98 incident reports were raised by service staff during 2021-22 (an increase of 40% over the previous year but is consistent with reporting levels pre-pandemic) Whilst an increase in reporting is a positive step toward a more safety aware culture within services, we are continuing to raise awareness amongst employees of the importance of incident reporting as requirement of the councils Health and Safety requirements.

27% of accidents and incidents overall related to staff working with children and young people with special needs, and 74% of incidents reported had an outcome of either a minor injury or no injury; however an increase in the number of incidents relating to verbal abuse against service employees rose again by 25% on the previous year and was the first reported instances of physical incidents against Council staff in two years.

Incidents reported by school employees went up from 197 to 204 in 2021-22. 98% of school incidents were recorded as minor injury and the slight increase in reporting was directly attributable to a special school, accounting for 80% of all incidents recorded, who continue to meet their objective of total reporting in order to ensure their risk prevention strategies, designed to protect the health and safety of staff and pupils alike, are well informed and kept up to date.

During 2021-22 no Improvement Notices or Prohibition Notices were served on the Council by the HSE for breaches of statutory health and safety duties nor were there any health and safety prosecutions against the Council

BACKGROUND

The Health and Safety Annual Report 2021-22 is a high-level report that looks back at internal health and safety performance during that financial years twelve month period, highlighting the main achievements over the year and outlining key priorities for the current year.

The annual report is transparent; it provides stakeholders with information on health and safety performance to enable an understanding of the key issues facing Council staff together with assurance to the Executive that the main risks have been identified, appropriately prioritised and are being adequately addressed.

The annual report is reviewed internally by various management and staff consultation groups. The Corporate Leadership Team, along with the central employee consultation forums for services and schools, receive supplementary information in the form of statistical charts with data breakdowns, for example, by work area and hazard type to aid analysis and the identification of trends and patterns in support of the ongoing development of suitable risk prevention strategies.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES – SERVICES

- No statutory notifications under RIDDOR were made to the HSE in 2021-22 in respect of the Council's services workforce.
- 98 incident reports in total were raised by service staff during 2021-22, an increase of 40% over the previous year. The average total services employee headcount increased remained fairly static across both those performance years. An increase in incident reporting numbers could be viewed as a positive indicator when factors such as greater awareness of the organisation's incident reporting policy, consistent engagement and recognising the benefits of reporting minor/near miss events towards accident prevention are considered.
- In 74% of all cases the outcome was either an injury of a minor nature, for example, a minor cut, scratches, bruising or hair being pulled or had no resulting injury.
- 2021-22 saw service employees report 20 incidents relating to verbal abuse and aggressive and threatening language being directed at service employees which is a 25% increase on the previous year records, which themselves had also seen a rise from the two previous performance years. These related to verbal abuse by members of the public where service employees in the course of their work were spoken to in a threatening, aggressive or offensive way.
- Verbal Abuse is a trend that continues to increase and is likely the result of employees now reporting more but it is likely that this figure is higher than currently reported given anecdotal evidence from service level forums and employee engagement that not all incidents are reported.
- 2021-22 was the first year of physical assaults being recorded against council staff since 2018; of the two recorded incidents one was of an SEN-related matter that resulted in injury and another which was referred directly to Thames Valley Police for further action due to the nature of the incident.
- Efforts to raise awareness amongst employees of the importance of incident reporting are ongoing.

- 2021-22 also saw service employees report 6 incidents relating to slips, trips or falls on same level, which is a modest increase but a figure very similar to the two previous performance years. Slips and trips whilst out in the community or where using internal staircases featured as a discernible trend.
- RIDDOR requires for work related injuries involving members of the public to be reported where the injured person was taken straight to hospital for treatment. In relation to the delivery of the Council's services during 2021-22 there were 3 RIDDOR notifications in respect of members of the public relating to countryside parks and sailing activities.
- The review of lone working highlighted in the 2021-22 annual report considered changes in the current needs, issues, and ways of working that the Covid-19 pandemic has produced and has led to the development of project group to identify relevant and pragmatic solutions aligned to supporting services in the proactive management of these work-related hazards.
- It worthy of noting that 2021-22 saw more near miss reporting by services than in previous years which allowed for preventative actions to be taken to reduce the risk associated with potential hazards and ensure the safety of both staff and members of the public.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES – SCHOOLS

- No statutory notifications under RIDDOR were made to the HSE in 2021-22 in respect of school employees.
- 204 incident reports were raised by school employees during 2021-22, a minor increase of 4% over the previous year. For the second performance year in a row the significant decrease in overall reporting from pre-pandemic levels from 501 incidents recorded in 2019-2020.
- Consistently a large number of incidents, 80%, were directly attributable to a special school catering for pupils with moderate, severe, or profound learning needs, many of whom have associated sensory motor and/or behavioral difficulties including autism spectrum disorder. Where the outcome of an incident involved injury, most were of a minor nature e.g. a scratch, bruise or temporary discomfort. A positive reporting culture is critical to this school's ongoing development of tailored pupil behaviour and support plans designed to protect staff and pupils alike. The staff at the school are trained in Team Teach methods, a training programme aimed at managing challenging behaviours through positive interventions.
- Against a positive three-year downward trend, there was a slight increase in 2021-22 in relation to the number of school employee reports of slip, trip and fall incidents, 14 compared to the previous year's 12. The primary hazard trend in this category related to poor housekeeping, for example, wet or slippery floors and trips whilst assisting activities and pupils in outdoor play areas. Slips and trips are the most common cause of injuries at work within school environments. This type of incident is preventable, not inevitable, and the Schools Workforce and Health and Safety Committee continues to look at ways of raising awareness of the hazards amongst employees and the role that everyone must play in preventing slip and trip injuries in the workplace.
- One school related RIDDOR notification was made during 2021-22 in respect of a person who was not an employee. The pupil swallowed a small metal clip leading to

choking when the object becoming lodged in their throat requiring them to attend hospital to remove the object. This was a unique incident, but an investigation was undertaken to ensure that all hazards were clearly identified and controls are in place so that risks are effectively controlled.

- The 2021-22 annual report highlights the completion of the Schools Seeking Assurance Programme which highlighted areas of improvement around monitoring and recording of and safety improvement plans were issued to the Headteacher of each community school. An assurance report has been presented to the Schools Workforce and Health and Safety Committee to develop where trends were identified across all community schools which has resulted in the development of a strategic improvement plan
- In response to an HSE inspection the Council's asbestos management framework was strengthened and made more practical; training was provided to Headteachers to support its implementation.

Corporate Health and Safety Priorities for 2021-22

- Based on the findings of the 2021-22 health and safety assurance programme in schools, to work in conjunction with the Schools Workforce and Health and Safety Committee to develop and follow through on the strategic improvement plan.
- Development of a Corporate Health and Safety Board to oversee the delivery of health and safety measures in the protection of our employees and customers by working with the Corporate Works Council and Schools Workforce Committee as bodies for consultation.
- Focus on the development of directors, managers and staff through further training in health and safety.
- Delivery in 2022-23 the health and safety assurance programme for service and corporate property following the same two-stage self-evaluation at local service level and assurance visit from the health and safety team to confirm compliance and that suitable and sufficient arrangements are in place and that risks are being effectively controlled.
- To strengthen the policies and arrangements relating to lone working and violence at work towards Council employees, including threats and abuse directed at our staff through social media and other remote channels

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. The Financial implication of the health and safety strategy have been met through current revenue and so no further financial recommendations are required at this point.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	Yes	
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	0	Yes	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	0	Yes	

Other Financial Information

A failure to comply with statutory duties has the potential to lead to both criminal and civil fines, prosecution costs and enforcement recovery costs.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Not Applicable

Public Sector Equality Duty

Due regard has been given to WBC's Public Sector Equality Duties.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Not Applicable

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not Applicable

List of Background Papers

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and 'Managing for Health and Safety' (HSG65), a guide for employers published by the HSE.

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