



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Health and Safety within Wokingham Borough Council

Annual Report 2022-23

Foreword – by Susan Parsonage

Wokingham Borough Council as an organisation takes health and safety seriously and is committed to the continuous development and improvement of our health and safety management system.

With that aim in mind, and as part of our overall governance arrangements, at this time each year we revisit and review our internal health and safety performance across the preceding twelve months and, taking that information into account and the lessons we have learned along the way, agree our current priorities for health and safety.

As we move ahead, we will continue to take a sensible and proportionate approach to health and safety management and remain committed to learning lessons along the way to improve further.

Susan Parsonage

Chief Executive

Wokingham Borough Council

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Introduction

Wokingham Borough Council has an established health and safety management system that reflects the “Plan Do, Check, Act” approach recommended to employers by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Our framework arrangements for managing health and safety include:

1. defined responsibilities for health and safety by role
2. consultation with employees on health, safety, and welfare matters
3. designated health and safety leads at both Director and Executive level
4. in-house health and safety specialists providing advice and support.
5. health and safety policies and guidance
6. health and safety training programmes.
7. investigations into the causes of accidents, incidents and near miss events
8. arrangements in place centrally and locally to monitor and review health and safety.

Corporate Health and Safety Role

The Corporate Health and Safety Team’s role has not changed. Its function continues to be to provide support and advice to all staff and members of the council on matters of health, safety, and welfare and to provide and maintain safety policies along with a suite of corporate arrangements and guidance to improve understanding of safe practice and to provide internal assurance checks on safety related areas.

Identification and mitigation of risk at the earliest possible stage must always be the goal, it is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Team to monitor accidents and incident trends, ensuring investigations are prompt and learning applied where appropriate and should it be required at any point the team will notify the HSE, or other relevant bodies of any reportable matters and coordinate the council’s cooperation and response.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report relates to the Council's internal health and safety performance during the period between April 2022 and March 2023 and covers the Council workforce, approx. 1426, and those schools where the Council is legally the employer, approx. 2024 colleagues, which is the case for maintained community schools including special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units.

The details included in this report do not include the health and safety performance or services provided to academy schools or Council partners as part of shared services.

In overall terms the health and safety performance during 2022-23 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 only 2 employee incidents necessitating a statutory notification to the HSE only one of which is being reviewed further by the HSE and an internal investigation is ongoing at the time of this report.

Health and Safety 22/23 Data & Intelligence

A total of 296 incidents were reported across the organisation (schools and services). This is a continuing trend of reduced reporting seen across all schools and services since 2019 and below the average reporting seen over the last 4 years.

Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Total Incidents	654	703	320	489	296

Part of this is attributed to the greater number of staff working at home or in lower risk office or home-based office environments.

Of the 296 reported incidents.

- 194 related to accidents/incidents affecting schools and service employees.
- 41 accidents/incidents split between contractors, agency staff and members of the public
- 61 accidents/incidents being reported to the council by maintained schools on behalf of school students/pupils.

A total of 78 incident service-related reports were raised by service staff during 2022-23 (a decrease from the previous year but is consistent with average reporting levels pre-pandemic).

However, 2022-23 saw a significant decrease in near miss reporting from previous years which has been used previously as preventative reporting to address potential improvements to the council's health and safety management.

The Health and Safety team will ensure this is part of the ongoing communications plan and include near miss reporting in the core health and safety modules within the corporate induction.

The total reported service incidents during this reporting period had an outcome of either a minor injury or were without injury; 26% of all incidents reported now relate to verbal abuse from members of the public towards Council employees which has seen an increase over the last 3 years and 41% related to social care related incidents from staff working with children and young people with special needs.

Following absence statistic provided to the Health and Safety team in 2022, two of the top four common causes of reported absences were identified as “stress related”, which include psychological ill health and “musculoskeletal”, commonly muscle injuries to the neck, shoulders, and lower back.

Wider programmes and mitigations for supporting staff wellbeing have already been shown to reduce the level of stress related absences including;

- Regular weekly wellbeing communications
- Established employee Assistance Programme
- Mental Health First Aiders across directorates to support employees
- Embedding welfare checks into one-to-one forms
- HR Business Partners were provided with training to support service managing stress at work.

Further communication and guidance on supporting “musculoskeletal” will be included in the Health and Safety communication plan, with importance being placed on suitable workstation assessments for both office and home activities, reductions in manual handling work where practicable and key wellbeing messages on active movement and reducing prolonged sedentary work.

In addition, the Health and Safety service have begun working closely with HR and the Councils occupational health providers to better differentiate absences to ensure amore tailored approach and holistic understanding of employee welfare risks. This monitoring this will form part of the forward plan for 2023-24 and will form part of future annual reporting to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Health and Safety board.

Ways of Working

Hybrid working has provided greater opportunities for flexible working and in supporting staff welfare; it has also introduced innovative methods for engagement with employees corporately which the Health and Safety service will be using to increase awareness of support available.

The Health and Safety team have identified areas that require strengthening; including how the health and safety management of the Council needs to adapt to better support flexible working.

The Health and Safety team will be engaging directly with the Modern Workforce Programme to ensure these areas of training, process and communication are embedded into the council future workforce planning approach.

Review and Improve

2022-23 saw the introduction of first corporate health and safety assurance programme which was carried out with Council services to support the development of greater health and safety competency at local level through self-evaluation, assurance checks and manager interviews whilst also providing the Council with assurance that key health and safety risks are being adequately controlled.

This self-evaluation will be an ongoing annual process, led by services and supported by the Health & Safety service. This assurance regime will also include a wider bi-annual audit to provide the Corporate Leadership Team of the effectiveness of the Councils Health and safety management system and ensure continuous improvement.

School Based Health and Safety 22/23

Incidents reported by school employees decreased by over 40% and is a 75% reduction in known incidents within schools since 2020. It is unknown why this has occurred and may be in part due to academisation and headcount reduction across community and voluntary schools however this is a larger proportion than expected and will be a point of enquiry during the upcoming school's assurance programme coming in 2023-24.

Positively 97% of school incidents were recorded as minor injury and only five incidences were noted where this caused an employee to become absent from their work. Only one of these incidents, a slip, trip and fall that resulted in a sustained shoulder injury fell under the requirements for RIDDOR as the employee's absence following the incident exceeded the seven consecutive days threshold and so became notifiable to the HSE.

HSE Enforcement

During 2022-23 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.

Serious Incident Investigations and Inspections

Two serious incident investigations were undertaken during 2022-2023 by the health and safety team, these incidents identified key areas of improvement and health and safety improvements which were actioned to support the overall compliance within the Council.

The incidents related to a work-related occupational health incident and a non-work-related first aid incident, both of which were referred post-incident to the health and safety team due to the nature of incidents and potential seriousness of risk exposure and/or potential breaches of health and safety legislation if mitigating action was not taken.

Key Findings were provided to Assistant Directors and service managers to address through safety improvement plans and included:

- Responsibilities for managing health and safety arrangements needed to be clear and understood.
- Risk Assessments in place needed to be strengthened to include specific risks
- Communication between services in supporting and managing emergency procedures within corporate buildings needed to be improved
- Local procedures required updating and to be communicated to employees following changes in organisational working arrangements.

The Health and Safety Team continue to work closely with relevant services to support improvements as outlined above.

Key Outcomes for 22/23

- Establishment of a corporate health and safety board to support strategic delivery of continual safety improvements across the council, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and sponsored by the Chief Executive to ensure there is senior accountability.
- The health and safety assurance programme was carried out to support the development of greater health and safety competency at local level through self-evaluation, assurance checks and manager interviews. The average overall performance score across the council for building compliance was 84% and an average score for directorates was 88% and above which would be considered as 'Good Performance'. 'Excellent Performance' would see scores of >90% and achievement of this score is the council's aim. The overall performance highlighted 25 specific areas across directorates that can be improved to support better health and safety arrangements.
- Engaged with Property Service and service areas to ensure the health and safety compliance of corporate property's and to undertake periodic reviews. This was achieved through a H&S Self-Monitoring Checklist to

ensure ongoing compliance and preventative actions for council owned and managed premises; enabling ownership by identified responsible persons. This work ensures ongoing checks and preventative actions to support safe working environments in place for council employees and members of the public.

- Higher risk activities were identified following the assurance process in areas such as countryside services, highways, housing and other frontline services which will require further review to ensure the ongoing compliance with health and safety arrangements are monitored and maintained whilst compliance areas in the wider council focused on lower level risks such as office work is managed by operational line managers through inductions and the newly established annual self-assessment process.
- There was continued engagement to raise awareness of workstation assessments and support services to ensure that suitable arrangements were in place for both office and home working employees.
- A data collection of lone workers across the organisation identified a larger number of lone workers than previously known, ongoing mitigation work is being undertaken to support services to ensure adequate arrangements and training of lone workers is undertaken and this forms part of the forward look for 2023-24 and the modern workforce programme.

Looking forward – our health and safety priorities for 2023-24

The areas noted below form part of the forward action plan which is shown in Appendix C. The health and safety board will be responsible for monitoring and ensure delivery of actions related to the forward plan.

Key actions include:

- Undertaking the seeking health and safety assurance programme in schools; this is a two-stage process involving self-evaluation of compliance at local level and assurance for the Council that key risks are being effectively controlled. The findings of the program form the basis of the Council's strategy for the continual improvement of health and safety management in its schools.
- Health and safety team to support front line services through periodic review and monitoring of real-world activities in relation to applicable legislation and current standards and guidance.
- Housing to commission a compliance health check as a positive and pro-active action to provide assurance on applicable legislation and approved codes of practice on property safety compliance and to understand WBCs current position, wider areas of good practices and recognise if any areas need to be strengthened.

- Support services in managing the health and safety risk associated with hybrid working through the Modern Workforce programme ensuring key challenges are identified to make effective use of the available resources and good practice.
- Work in collaboration with HR to seek reductions in days lost due to stress related and illness and mental ill health.
- Seek reduction in days lost due to work related incidents and ill health - particularly those associated musculoskeletal Injures, including manual handling and display screen equipment.
- Review and update existing health and safety training modules and develop new training, instruction, and information to support areas of competencies required for the effective management and delivery of health and safety at work.
- Support 'bite-size' H&S training for managers to develop health and safety awareness courses across service areas.

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