



CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 16TH NOVEMBER 2020 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillor D. Havard (Chair)
Councillor S. Kent (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

M. Adams, P. Bevan, A G Higgs and W. Williams.

Councillor C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services).

Together with:

E. Townsend (Health and Safety Manager), D. Beecham (Electoral Services Manager), A. Wigley (Principal Health and Safety Officer), S. Richards (Head of Education, Planning and Strategy), M. Williams (Interim Head of Property Services) and C. Evans (Committee Services Officer).

Trade Union Representatives:

J. Garcia (UNISON).

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

It was moved and seconded that Councillor D. Havard be appointed as Chair and Councillor S. Kent be appointed as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year. By a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors D. Hardacre and R. Phillips (Asbestos Officer), N. Funnell (GMB) and L. Dallimore (UNISON)

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

4. MINUTES – 17TH FEBRUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 17th

February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

5. ACCIDENT STATISTICS REPORT FOR JANUARY – SEPTEMBER 2020

The report provided Members, Management and Trade Union Safety Representatives with the numbers and types of work-related accidents/ incidents that occurred during the period of January to September 2020 (inclusive). Accident statistics are produced for each quarter and presented to the members of the Health and Safety Committee for information.

The Committee noted that the statistics take into account the impact of the Pandemic, which is evidenced in the low number of accidents being reported, due to a large proportion of the workforce working from home.

The Committee thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member queried whether it would be possible to conduct home visits to ensure staff safety and Officers explained that this would not be possible, the statistics relate only to reports of accidents in the workplace, for which the Council could be held responsible. Members of staff working from home have been provided with guidance on the correct set up of equipment, and further guidance will be made available shortly on the Intranet.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of an electronic show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the contents of the report be noted.

6. RECENT HSE UPDATES

The report provided the Committee with information about the recent relevant accident, incidents and prosecutions by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The report was provided as information for members of the Committee to ensure that they are kept informed of any matters that could impact on the management of health and safety within the Council.

The report outlined a number of recent cases which included the death of a six-year-old girl following being hit by a falling tree at school, Local Authority Prosecution as a result of roll over of an all-terrain vehicle, South Wales Police prosecution following an electric shock during installation of data cables, School prosecuted for allowing pupils to operate unsafe machinery during a lesson, a college was fined for exposing employees and subcontractor to asbestos and a Borough Council prosecution after a Teacher was assaulted by a pupil. Members were assured that the Local Authority continues to prioritise Health and Safety, and whilst the HSE are less proactive than previously, they will investigate and prosecute if there are health and safety failings. Ensuring that health and safety is considered, and risks assessed and controlled, assists the Authority in meeting its legal obligations, in protecting the health and safety of employees and others.

The Committee thanked the Officers for the report and discussion ensued.

A Member sought further information around the roll over of an all-terrain vehicle and queried whether the Council has any of these vehicles. Officers explained that the vehicles could include the large lawn mowers, ride on tractors etc. and all of which are fitted with a roll cage and lap belt, to ensure the drivers safety should the vehicle overturn, and prevent the drivers instinct to jump free of the vehicle, which could result in the vehicle crushing the driver.

Discussion took place around the prosecution of a school for allowing pupils to use unsafe machinery, and Members raised a number of concerns for this practice being undertaken in Caerphilly County Borough Council schools. Officers explained that regular inspections are undertaken at the schools and staff are appropriately trained to use the machinery. It is however the responsibility of the school and Head Teacher to ensure that every safety precaution is undertaken and that a responsible and qualified member of staff supervises the use of the machinery. Members were assured that Risk Assessments are in place in schools with annual inspections of machinery being undertaken and training is undertaken, however, following Members concerns, more frequent inspections will be considered as a priority.

The Committee noted that recent inspections were undertaken by the HSE at 2 schools, Greenhill and Islwyn High. The inspections considered the impact of Covid-19 and the measures in place to mitigate it. Whilst there were no issues identified during the inspection, recommendations for good practice were made such as ventilation, hand washing and social distancing.

A Member, in noting the tragic reporting of a six-year-old child being killed as a result of a falling tree, sought clarification on the inspection of fallen trees and maintenance for safety reasons. Officers assured the Committee that there is a strict and robust inspection programme in place, as the Council has a legal responsibility for the safety of trees on the public highway and school grounds, and therefore expert inspections are conducted. It was noted that Tree surgeons undertaken regular inspections to ensure safety.

In addition, a Member sought further information on the inspections of trees in respect of ground saturation, as a result of increased rainfall. Officers explained that whilst the full inspection criteria was not available at the meeting, Members were assured that the inspections were undertaken by experts, both from within the Council and external organisations to ensure safety of trees.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of an electronic show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the contents of the report be noted.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATES

The report provided the Health and Safety Committee Members with an update on the workload and activities undertaken by the Health and Safety Team since the start of the global pandemic.

It was noted that the Health and Safety Team workload has changed significantly reflecting the new challenges and risks associated with managing local authority services during a global pandemic. The report outlines the work undertaken by the team over the past months and also focuses on areas for attention moving forward.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the report and discussion ensued.

A Trade Union Representative, in noting the changing priorities of the team as a result of the demands of the pandemic sought reassurances that there were sufficient staff in place to deal with the demands on the team, and any future issues raised as a result of the pandemic, or Local Authority needs. Officers explained that regular discussions continue with the Health and Safety team around capacity and workloads and the Committee were assured that whilst the team are doing an excellent job within their current resources and demands, any changes will be dealt with as required.

In acknowledging the staff within the Health and Safety Team and staff across the Authority for the exemplary efforts during the pandemic, a Member wished to highlight the way in which Primary School children are responding to the crisis, upholding the measures in place to keep them safe and taking the restrictions in their stride.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the recommendation in the report be approved. By way of an electronic show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that for the reasons outlined at the meeting the workload continues to be prioritised to reflect organisational needs whilst ensuring that the key team workload and legislative requirements are met.

8. REPORTING OF INJURIES, DISEASES AND DANGEROUS OCCURENCES REGULATIONS (RIDDOR) – GUIDANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY ON REPORTING OF COVID-19. (DISCUSSION)

Officers provided the Committee with an update on the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) in relation to the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was noted that the HSE Guidance recommends reporting of a positive case of Covid-19 should the disease be contracted as a result of work, and there is reasonable evidence that it has been contracted as a result of an increased risk of exposure. This would not include working with the general public, but a specific incident in which a positive case has been contracted and no measures have been put in place to mitigate this risk of exposure.

As a result, members noted that there have been no reports of any incidents, as all necessary precautions are taken for staff to be provided with appropriate protection where working with the general public and risk of exposure. Appropriate risk assessments have also been undertaken across the Local Authority in order to ascertain this risk and appropriate measures in place to protect the public and staff.

The Committee thanked the Officer for the update and discussion ensued.

A Member highlighted that complaints have been received by some residents in which they have been told by Housing staff that urgent repairs are unable to be conducted as a result of the ongoing restrictions. Officers assured Members that there have been risk assessments undertaken and works are continuing within the Housing Department and recommended that these queries be highlighted to the Chief Housing Officer for clarification.

Following consideration and discussion, it was moved and seconded that the update be noted. By way of an electronic show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

9. HOME WORKING DSE. (DISCUSSION)

The Committee were provided with background information in relation to a Flexible Working report, which was considered by Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 29th

September 2020 and Cabinet on 14th October 2020, which sought approval for a more formal approach to flexible working, building on the progress made in response of working in a flexible manner throughout the lockdown. It was noted that the speed and nature of the lockdown resulted in the Council having to equip and train a significant proportion of the workforce to enable them to work remotely.

Whilst the transformation to the new model of service delivery happened at a significant pace, the technology platforms have formed the foundations of remote working and have proven to be intuitive and stable and some sections of the workforce have been operating remotely and very effectively since the commencement of the lockdown, with more and more services being brought back online, resulting in less reliance on buildings, premises and travel.

As a result of this, a survey was conducted across the workforce and whilst it has found that many are happy to continue agile working, possibly as a mixture of both home and office-based working, some have found it to be isolating. It is therefore imperative that, the model embedded going forward meets the differing needs of staff, as well as reducing operating costs associated with service delivery.

The Head of People Services added that any plans going forward will be implemented with the support and consultation with Members and Trade Unions, as well as staff, and reiterated the importance of getting the balance right. With this in mind, as more people will look to have more permanent home working, it is important that staff are provided with the right equipment to safely undertaken their roles, reducing work related strains.

Officers explained that guidance has been provided on the Intranet for staff on the correct set up of home office equipment, and tools to consider their environment etc. It was noted that as the 'novelty' of home working wears off, reviews will need to be conducted around the equipment in use, whether it is appropriate for the role and its set up for optimum use and to mitigate any strain.

The Committee thanked the Officers and noted the update.

The meeting closed at 11.15 am.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR