



CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON MONDAY, 21ST JUNE 2021 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Councillors:

M. Adams, P. Bevan, D. Hardacre, D. Havard, S. Kent, W. Williams.

Councillor C. Gordon (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services)

Together with:

R. Edmunds (Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services), E. Townsend (Health and Safety Manager), L. Donovan (Head of People Services), S. Richards (Head of Education Planning and Strategy), A. Evans (Principal Health and Safety Training Officer), A. Wigley (Principal Health and Safety Officer) and R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer).

Trade Union Representatives: L. Dallimore (UNISON), J. Garcia (UNISON), N. Funnell (GMB)

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 up this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED THAT Councillor D. Havard be appointed as Chair for the ensuing year and Councillor S. Kent be appointed as Vice-Chair for the ensuing year.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A.G Higgs, together with D. Beecham (Electoral Services Manager), C. Edwards (Environmental Health Manager), J. Edwards (Service Manager Children's Services) and M. Williams (Interim Head of Property Services).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

4-5. MINUTES – 16TH NOVEMBER 2020

It was moved and seconded that the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 16th November 2020 be approved as a correct record and by a show of hands up this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee held on 16th November 2020 be approved as a correct record.

Arising from the minutes of the last meeting in relation to a discussion on Home Working DSE, the Chair expressed his praise for the technical support and backup offered by IT Services during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to facilitate home working for Council staff.

A discussion followed in relation to homeworking and initial feedback from a recent staff survey on agile working, the results of which will be reported to Members in due course. Trade Unions representatives referred to the cancellation of the February 2021 committee meeting and emphasised the importance and value of regular meetings to provide staff reassurance on Health and Safety matters. They also expressed the importance of ensuring that all staff have the equipment and support mechanisms in place to work from home. In response, Officers highlighted the need for the Health and Safety team to reprioritise their workloads during the pandemic and reiterated that even though the last meeting had been cancelled, the Health and Safety team were still fully available to engage and communicate with staff in regards to their homeworking needs.

Questions were received from Members regarding home working DSE assessments for staff. Officers explained that the Council does not have the resources to individually assess the homeworking facilities of every single Council employee but that the Council has numerous resources and training videos in place to assist staff with their homeworking needs. Support is also offered upon request through the Microsoft Teams platform, where Council staff can show Health and Safety officers their homeworking setup and receive suitable advice.

Discussion also centred around an exercise by Heads of Service to determine which roles can be carried out at home and queries were received on where liability would rest if an employee requires special equipment (such as for a musculoskeletal condition) and is required to work from home but does not have the space to accommodate this equipment.

The Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services provided clarification on this exercise and emphasised that this will involve triangulation between the Head of Service and the employee to determine where roles are delivered from in future. The Corporate Director also highlighted that in September 2020, Cabinet allocated £0.5m towards agile working and the provision of equipment and he encouraged the Trade Unions to remind their members that there is money set aside to access the right equipment for their needs. In addition, the Corporate Director emphasised the difficulties over the past 12 months, the learning that had been achieved and the areas for improvement that had been identified, and gave reassurances that mechanisms are already in place to make sure staff are supported. He explained that in scenarios where employees do not have the space for their equipment at home, they should talk to their line manager in these exceptional circumstances so that alternative arrangements can be made, such as working from office accommodation instead.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS

Consideration was given to the following reports.

6. HEALTH AND SAFETY OVERVIEW – PRESENTATION

Emma Townsend (Health and Safety Manager) gave a presentation to the Committee which reflected on the work of the Council's Health and Safety Team over the last 15 months and the position going forward.

Members were advised that 2020 had been a challenging year for the department, particularly given the demands on workloads as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, the team had to allocate all available resources into developing guidance and templates to support service areas and managers in providing Covid-safe arrangements, which had to be updated frequently in line with changing Welsh Government guidance, and so the workload has been hugely challenging and Covid-reactive. It was explained that the team had also faced some staff shortages at the start of the pandemic due to Officers leaving or retiring (although these posts have since been filled).

The team have concentrated on producing Health and Safety bulletins (with at least 20 editions produced to reflect the ever-changing guidance), risk assessments have been carried out, work has been done with Procurement to order and deliver PPE and hand sanitizer, and countless visits have been carried out to reopen Council premises such as leisure centres and libraries. Every school in the county borough has had a visit and continues to receive visits. The Team have also assisted in Covid-related investigations where necessary.

The current position is that Covid remains a significant priority and is becoming part of the routine workload as service areas look to adapt post-Covid. The routine Health and Safety workload also remains, which was pushed back due to Covid and has now become a key priority. Reactive unplanned workloads have also continued, together with projects such as election work (where the team have provided support around the Covid-safe management of polling stations), migration of the RAMIS system to a new module and an asbestos review.

Members were advised that progress has been made in respect of the RAMIS migration, general inspections under a risk prioritised programme, fire risk assessments, staffing (which will form part of a corporate review), the asbestos review, training and adapting to new ways of working, and regular attendance/briefings at management meetings to promote health and safety engagement.

Going forward, the Health and Safety Team have a plan to meet demands post-Covid, including the realignment of workload to the Corporate Health and Safety action plan., and Mrs Townsend offered to bring an update report to the next Committee to provide Members' reassurance on the latest position across the department. The key importance of communication through the Health and Safety team was emphasised, which is being delivered through corporate messages, training and statistics and a renewed focus on engagement and visibility. Overall, staff are being encouraged to think about health and safety and the risks that they encounter or the risks that they are managing. The Team are also examining the introduction of an escalation procedure across all directorates which will be particularly significant for general inspections. Health and Safety are also carrying out a piece of work to look at ensuring health and safety training is linked to key roles and make it easier for managers and employees to identify the minimum training needed to carry out key roles. In closing, Mrs Townsend emphasised the need to consolidate successes to date and continue to review areas for improvement.

Mrs Townsend was thanked for her presentation and Members acknowledged the hard work and efforts of the Health and Safety Team over the last 15 months. Reference was made to the importance of regular Corporate Health and Safety committee meetings and whether the frequency of meetings could be increased. Mrs Townsend suggested that the frequency

could be discussed at another time but gave reassurances that the regularly scheduled meetings held three times a year would be back on track for the November 2021 meeting, and also encouraged Members to approach her with any items for discussions at future meetings.

Following consideration of the presentation the Committee noted its contents.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING OVERVIEW - PRESENTATION

Ali Evans (Principal Health and Safety Training Officer) gave a presentation to the Committee which outlined details of the training programmes being delivered by the Health and Safety Team.

Members were provided with an overview of the Health and Safety team structure, with it noted that the department are a relatively small team with numerous responsibilities. It was explained that Health and Safety training is of fundamental importance for a number of reasons, including legal compliance, the reduction of workplace accidents and injuries, increased employee productivity, protection against liability claims, cost effectiveness, and the Council's moral obligation to keep all its employees safe. Members were also provided with examples of the in-house training delivered by Health and Safety (such as IOSH) and the considerable savings that can be made when compared to external providers. The Health and Safety team also deliver specialist training to neighbouring local authorities in the region which creates income generation opportunities for the Authority.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the department's Training Directory with a portfolio of 28 courses currently on offer. Health and Safety also offer management of refresher training, support with training needs analysis for all service areas, bespoke packages designed and delivered across the Authority to meet service needs, effective record keeping to support managers and employees, together with the training delivery to other local authorities and partners/private companies such as Welsh Water, local health boards and Network Rail. It was explained that the ITrent system is used to manage all training interventions which means that managers can easily access training records for themselves and their teams.

During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was quickly realised that classroom training was not an option and many trainers were redeployed to help in other areas such as free school meals delivery, setting up service hubs and working with other service areas, and work was also undertaken to provide and fit PPE for Council key workers. It was recognised that training would need to continue to ensure staff safety but the method of delivery would need to quickly adapt, and so the department created a number of training videos and toolbox talks to deliver key messages. The Team received some direction from the HSE around extending some specific certificates (such as first aid), so were able to extend some timescales, but quickly realised that training would have to be delivered in a different way.

A blended learning approach was subsequently undertaken, which has brought new opportunities and is something the Team will continue to utilise and develop moving forward, along with the video resources available. It was explained that during the pandemic, a question emerged around whether the training needs of staff needed to increase or change, (particularly in terms of temporary redeployment) and subsequently the Team issued managers with resources to ensure that staff could safely carry out their new duties. Moving forward to the Covid-19 recovery stage, this will generate further training needs due to changes in staff responsibilities or the way in which they work.

It has been established that digital training works well for many types of training as it

minimises travelling and the need to secure venues, but that where classroom training is needed for practical elements such as first aid training and asbestos, the Team will continue with this but with Covid-secure processes in place. It was noted that the Team were commended by Environmental Health following one first aid course where a delegate had tested positive for Covid-19 but none of the other attendees were affected because they had appropriate processes such as social distancing in place.

The Committee were advised that the Health and Safety Team delivered 139 training courses between April 2020 and March 2021. 872 delegates were trained and £51,592 of income was generated from this training. Overall, it has been a successful year training-wise, although there is still work to do and the Team are currently working on a number of projects such as an accident investigation reporting video for managers, a refresher for premises managers, and will continue to deliver a blended learning approach in order to respond to the ever-changing situation.

Mrs Evans was thanked for her presentation and Members were pleased to note the level of training and commended the Health and Safety Team for the work they have carried out and the service that is offered, particularly given the many challenges over the past year. They also expressed the need to ensure that priorities and investment continue to be put in place (particularly around fire safety measures) and for the Team to continue this momentum moving forward.

Following consideration of the presentation the Committee noted its contents.

8. RECENT HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE UPDATES

Andrew Wigley (Principal Health and Safety Officer) presented the report, which provided the Committee with information about the recent relevant accident, incidents and prosecutions by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) since the last Committee report in November 2020.

Members were asked to note the contents of the report, which was provided as information for the Committee to ensure they are kept informed of any matters that could impact on the management of health and safety within the Council.

Mr Wigley drew Members' attention to the prosecution of London Council after a child died when playground equipment collapsed on her in a park, which resulted in a fine of £330,000 plus costs. Mr Wigley has since contacted Caerphilly Council's Parks Department in relation to the reopening of Cwmcarn Forest Drive who have confirmed they do not have any such play equipment on site. During the conversation with Parks, an issue was raised around rope swings being installed by members of the public from trees on Council land, with it confirmed by Parks that where these are found on Council land, these will be removed.

Members were advised of the prosecution of Cheshire Council for failing to maintain safety railings at a city centre location, leading to a child's fall, and which resulted in a fine of £300,000 plus costs. Mr Wigley advised that he has contacted Caerphilly's Town Centre Management Team, who have confirmed that they have inspection procedures in place for any similar equipment.

The Committee were informed of the prosecution of a school in Cambridge (not Local Authority maintained) due to a low wall posing a trip hazard, with it found that the school had failed to ensure the area was adequately lit and that a pedestrian site safety assessment had failed to identify the risk of tripping over the wall. The school was fined £52,800 plus costs.

Mr Wigley explained that Caerphilly Council will incorporate this check into school general inspection reports.

Mr Wigley also referred to a prosecution in Northamptonshire where a private waste company was fined £1.2m after a worker was fatally injured by a reversing vehicle. Mr Wigley stated that he has contacted Caerphilly's Refuse and Cleansing department who have confirmed that route risk assessments are in place, together with adequate training and supervision measures.

Mr Wigley was thanked for his update and questions were invited from Members. A query was received regarding new play equipment at Morgan Jones Park and the need for the installation of a safety gate to separate the high-speed swing equipment from passing pedestrians. Mr Wigley confirmed that a temporary barrier had been installed at the entrance to the play equipment, but he would follow up this matter with the Parks department.

A query was also received regarding wooden structures located in school playgrounds and the maintenance/safety checks in place for these. Mr Wigley explained that in relation to external play equipment, schools are recommended to have a post-installation examination carried out by an independent inspector, to verify that the equipment has been manufactured and installed in accordance with the relevant European safety standard. Members were advised that following any accident, it would be recommended to the school that they arrange an independent examination of the equipment in order to defend any civil claims. In regard to ongoing maintenance, it is recommended to the school that they have an annual inspection which is then uploaded onto RAMIS. Therefore there are procedures in place, but the onus is on the school to follow the recommendations of the Health and Safety Team.

Following consideration of the report the Committee noted its contents.

9. ACCIDENT STATISTICS REPORT FOR APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021

Andrew Wigley (Principal Health and Safety Officer) presented the report, which provided the Committee with the numbers and types of work-related accidents/ incidents for the Council that occurred during the period of April 2020 to March 2021 (inclusive). Accident statistics are produced for each quarter and presented to the members of the Health and Safety Committee for information. Appended to the report were graphs illustrating these statistics which included the previous 2 years for comparison, and the Committee were asked to note the contents of the report.

It was noted that not all accidents reported to the Health and Safety Team are necessarily considered as recordable, and so only those instances that arise out of a connection with work are recorded. Members were advised that accident statistics remain consistently low, with the majority of accidents being minor injuries, and those that are reported are typically over 7 days incapacitation or 7 days absence from work.

Mr Wigley was thanked for the update and questions were invited from Members. Clarification was sought on the circumstances of a physical assault by a person that was included at Appendix 5 of the report and Officers provided further information regarding this incident. A Member asked if there were any accidents reported as a result of staff working at home. Mr Wigley confirmed that there were none but added that this would only be recorded as work-related if, for example, there was a fault arising from the Council work equipment that had been provided for them to use at home.

Following consideration of the report the Committee noted its contents.

The meeting closed at 11.27 am.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2021, they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR