

# HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

23RD JUNE 2005

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### Wards Affected

None

### Purpose

To receive a report on actions taken during the last year to progress addressing Health and Safety issues.

### Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

### Recommendation

**That the report be noted.**

### Reasons

The Council has put in place a series of actions to improve the health, safety and well-being of its workforce. These actions have been effective in identifying sickness absence issues to be addressed and reducing employee turnover rates to well below the average for Local Government.

### Considerations

1. The actions taken which are described in this report are part of a continuing process and are monitored by the Safety Committee at their quarterly meetings. During 2004 the Head of Human Resources took over the chair for these meetings as it was felt important that a member of the Chief Executive's Management Team chairs the Safety Committee. It is pleasing to note that this increased profile of the Safety Committee has led to improved attendance by all Directorates. Update reports from the Safety Committee are presented to the Chief Executive's Management Team for consideration and action. The Trades Unions have two representatives on the Committee who have been suitably trained by their union.
2. Following discussions with the Health and Safety Executive the Chief Executive's Management Team agreed a health and safety action plan. As part of this action plan it was decided that an assessment would be carried out on how well change is managed within the Council. This has been done using the Staff Opinion Survey as the vehicle so that the views of as many employees as possible could be captured.
3. Overall the "Change Management" questions showed 63% agreed that the organisation communicated with employees regularly when going through change.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from David Johnson, Head of Human Resources on 01432 383055

Individual Directorate results have been produced and circulated so that they can be discussed and addressed within the Directorate Management teams and also involving the Council's Health and Safety Officers to provide support to the Directorates.

4. A number of further actions have been taken in response to issues identified via Management Teams. These include

- The Occupational Health Unit regularly runs a series of 'lifestyles days' where employee's health is monitored and advice and guidance is given on suitable life styles. It is similar to a well man or well woman clinic with the inclusion of different and alternative therapies to reduce stress. The lifestyles days are held annually and set up in two different premises on two different days so as to allow as many employees as possible to attend. Last year 151 employees attended and of these 13 employees were referred to their GP for further checks because initial indications were showing high blood sugars, cholesterol or blood pressure. They were advised to see their GP with an accompanying report. The Council's employee assistance counsellors are also in attendance to discuss issues with the employees.

The role of the employee assistance counsellors is to provide a confidential counselling service to individual or groups of employees distracted from the effective performance of their duties by a range of personal concerns, including but not limited to: emotional stress, relationships, family, alcohol, drugs, financial, legal or work-related stress, organisational change and career issues. Additionally they also assist the organisation in the identification and amelioration of workplace stressors which adversely affect job performance through the provision of consultancy, training and group support. An example of this is the provision of mediation services following the breakdown of working relationships.

- A robust process was put in place to ensure the accurate reporting and recording of employee absence as a result of recommendations made following an audit of the sickness absence statistics. Attached at Appendix 1 is the end of year absence figures by Directorate/Department. It shows the level of sickness absence to be 10.3 days per employee. The average for local authorities employees is 10.5 days per employee. As part of the monitoring of sickness absence, employees on long-term sickness are referred to our Occupational Health Physician following a period of absence of 4 calendar weeks. The trigger of 4 short-term absences over a period of 6 months is also used as a benchmark for referral to Occupational Health. Reports on who meets each criterion are circulated monthly to Directorate Personnel Officers, who liaise with managers to determine the best course of action.
- Herefordshire Council has a fast track physiotherapy system in place to reduce the time taken for a reported muscular-skeletal disorder to receive treatment.
- Further a rehabilitation scheme is established for a phased return to work should it be needed to assist employees back to work. It is monitored by Occupational Health and is being used very successfully across the organisation.
- A number of Managing Attendance workshops were run last year. The workshop is designed for 6 to 8 management participants and the use of communication skills with employees forms a major part of the course material. The course is being reviewed to ensure Managers are given the information and training to enable them to manage sickness absence in the workplace in a caring and appropriate manner.
- A stress (psychosocial hazards) risk assessment template has been published

and can be downloaded from the Intranet. The HSE Stress Management Standards are used as hazards. The suggested preventative measures against each hazard are listed for managers to use when doing the risk assessment. Over the last two years 84 employees from all Directorates have been trained to carry out the risk assessments.

- An annual Managing Safely Institute of Safety and Health accredited certificate course was run during May. Over the last 3 years 28 managers have attended this course run by accredited trainers. A refresher one-day course is also run for employees who took the Managing Safely course more than three years ago. The course gives the delegates a basic qualification in safety and health. The aim of the course is to ensure that safety requirements are appreciated by those employed in a managerial role and enables them to review departmental systems for safety, introducing new controls or implementing changes as appropriate to make the workplace safe.
- In addition to the above course for managers a series of regular corporate health and safety training courses are available for all employees. This includes Health and Safety induction for all new employees, Risk Assessments and Manual Handling.
- Directorates also provide specialist Health and Safety training geared towards specific jobs such as managing personal safety for front line employees.
- Attached at Appendix 2 are statistics relating to accidents for the year ending 31/3/05. Overall there has been little change in the number of accidents year on year. In respect of reportable accidents to the Health and Safety Executive, i.e. those where the employee is subsequently absent for 3 or more days, Herefordshire Council has one of the lowest rates across the West Midlands. Violence at work and reports of those who have suffered a physical assault has generally remained static year on year. Work is ongoing to further implement control and preventative measures to reduce the level of incidents.

## **Risk Management**

The risk of not having adequate mechanisms in place to manage health and safety issues is that such a situation would likely lead to a reduction in the quality of service delivery as a result of increased levels of sickness absence, higher rates of employee turnover and lower levels of morale and motivation.

Processes have therefore been put in place to manage these risks using best practice advice and guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and the National Employers Organisation for Local Government

## **Consultees**

Recognised Trades Unions, Health and Safety Committee.

## **Background Papers**

None identified.