

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 6 JUNE 2022

ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY 2021/22 UPDATE

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Authority aims to minimise the incidence of workplace risks and promote staff wellbeing by providing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment. The Authority sees Health and Safety as being part of everyday good management and adopted a Health and Safety Policy in 2007, which was subsequently updated in August 2010 and September 2014. A further review and update of the Policy was approved by this Committee on 5 November 2018 and the latest review will take place in 2022 following an informal audit.
- 1.2 Members have responsibility for monitoring the Health and Safety Policy and so the purpose of this report is to update Members on how the Authority has discharged its Health and Safety duties over the last year. Needless to say a huge part of this year's work has once again been informed by our response to the pandemic and ensuring our work continues safely firstly within Government guidelines and latterly in terms of best practice and the Authority's own risk assessments and guidelines to ensure the safety of our staff, members and the public.

2 Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.1 Responsibility for discharging the Authority's duty to safeguard Health and Safety rests with the Chief Executive, those responsibilities being delegated to the Executive Leadership team and Managers for the implementation of policy and practice and for ensuring that all employees are aware of their responsibilities, both for themselves and others. Operational ownership for Health and Safety has been assigned to the Executive Director (working with the Head of Resources on the response to Covid), assisted by the Corporate Services Manager and Business Support Officer.
- 2.2 The table below sets out the relevant areas of responsibility within the organisation.

Officer/Group	Responsibility
CEO (Alison Barnes)	Overall responsibility for ensuring Health and Safety policy and legal requirements are adhered to at all times.
Lead Member (Patrick Heneghan)	Ensures Member input into matters of Health and Safety.
Executive Director (Steve Avery)	Operational ownership for Health and Safety across the Authority.
Health and Safety Representatives and line managers	Responsible for representing the individual teams and undertaking specific tasks, e.g. reporting areas of concern and ensuring health and safety procedures are followed.
Health and Safety Forum	Ensure Health and Safety best practice is acted upon across the organisation and issues discussed and remedied. The Forum meets twice a year (frequency increased in 2021 due to the pandemic) and includes the Lead Member and officers as set out above, with specialist advice being provided by the Corporate Health and Safety Manager (NFDC).
Health and Safety Quarterly meetings	Responsible for addressing 'day to day' health and safety issues and attended by the Executive Director, Head of Resources, Manager of Corporate Services and the Business Support Officer.
All staff	Responsible for their own Health and Safety whilst at work or on work duties.

3 Coronavirus Pandemic in 2021/22

- 3.1 As members will be aware, the pandemic had a significant impact across the world in 2020/21 and continued into 2021/22. The Authority was quick to put in place measures to support staff and our customers during 2020 and continued to do so in 2021. ELT continued to monitor and review the implications of the virus as new strains evolved in 2021. Other measures included ongoing work of the Authority's Covid-19 working group under the leadership of the Executive Director which in 2021 looked at our ways of working going forward, with staff consulted and updated in the light of the easing and then removal of all national covid restrictions.
- 3.2 The number of Health and Safety Forum meetings were stepped up and took place every six weeks in 2021, with important information on staff wellbeing being provided by the Forum representatives and information cascaded down to staff via the representatives. The Forum also provides an opportunity to capture learning and best practice from around the organisation and to share health and safety news and views. With the easing of the Covid situation, the Forum has now moved to quarterly meetings.

- 3.3 During 2021 a small number of staff were able to work out of the offices safely to carry out essential office based tasks. Staff were also made aware of our Risk Assessments and Guidance regarding the use of the Town Hall offices in response to the evolving situation around Covid and ensured that everyone was aware and comfortable with the covid-secure measures we had put in place and the need to follow the Government's guidance.
- 3.4 Teams are currently being consulted through their line managers on potential new ways of working as we return to the office and potentially more longer-term, permanent changes to our ways of working. Our Risk Assessments and guidance will be aligned to any changes in this regard.
- 3.5 Other measures which were begun in 2020 and continued in 2021 to support staff were our annual event known as Discovery Days, the purpose of this event is for staff to spend some time on a selected Discovery Day of their choice to discover more about the New Forest National Park, to gain a deeper understanding about a specific area of work that the Authority undertakes and to provide an opportunity to interact with colleagues. In 2021, these events were conducted in an informal, safe and supportive format. A number of events to further support staff were arranged by the Wellbeing Group including Wonderwalks, National Perk Café and wellbeing sessions.

4. Health and Safety Audit

- 4.1 Members may recall that in the annual report to the Committee in June 2021, it was reported that officers had asked the Health and Safety Advisor at New Forest District Council to carry out an informal audit of the Authority's overall Health and Safety provision and identify any gaps or areas for improvement.
- 4.2 The executive summary of the audit was also reported to that meeting and a relevant a extract of the report follows:

The New Forest National Park have shown to be strong in a number of areas of health and safety management. It is clear from discussions with senior management, supervisors, employees and union members that the health, safety and welfare of employees is taken very seriously. Employees and union members felt very confident that senior management would take appropriate action if required to. Although the NPA have a very good health and safety culture within the organisation a number of areas do require improvement.

- 4.3 Officers are currently working through the recommendations arising from the audit and have put in place a timeline for these to be completed within available resources. Progress against these recommendations are regularly reported to the Health and Safety Forum.

5. Other Health and Safety Activity undertaken during 2021/2022

- In addition to meetings of the Forum, H&S meetings of officers have continued between relevant officers and allow staff to address all health and safety issues as they arise as well as those raised at the Forum meetings.
- The Health and Safety documents previously contained on the Authority's corporate drive are now in SharePoint in accordance with the review of the Authority's records management. Relevant H&S policies and advice are also available to view on the Authority's intranet.
- A risk assessment template has been agreed and implemented. This has standardised assessments providing uniformity and continuity. The template and completed risk assessments are now stored centrally and are accessible to all staff.
- Prior to the pandemic and staff working from home, officers had redrafted the emergency fire evacuation procedure to ensure that NPA staff can be safely evacuated from the building in an emergency. This procedure is again being reviewed as restrictions end and staff return to the offices.
- The testing of the fire alarm has continued throughout 2021 and fire evacuation drills will start once the fire evacuation procedure has been finalised and new office based fire wardens have been appointed.
- The Authority's Risk Log (including risks and mitigation relevant to staff health and safety) is under regular review by the Executive Board and six monthly by this Committee, and recently received input from David Bence.

5.1 Ensuring that staff are able to work in a secure and safe office environment is an important aspect of the Authority's Health and Safety work. During the last year:

- DSE (Display Screen Equipment) online assessment for staff working at home in response to the pandemic and Government restrictions was largely carried out in 2020 and was rolled over into 2021, especially for new staff. This important assessment is a key tool in helping to identify and take steps to avoid neck, shoulder, back or arm pain, as well as fatigue and eyestrain relating to staff workstations at home.
- PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) has been made available to protect staff from workplace hazards and who have completed a risk assessment and particularly to those staff at possible risk during the pandemic.
- As part of the overall virus mitigation measures, the reception continues to be screened with Perspex to protect staff from exposure to the virus. This area

has been open to the public for some time now following the easing of restrictions.

- A return to physical Committee and Authority meetings commenced in May 2021 and external venues and a range of other precautions and risk assessments were implemented to ensure optimum safety for staff, members and the public and to minimise exposure to the virus.

6 Recorded Health and Safety incidents

6.1 During the last 12 months there were 8 recorded incidents logged in the Accident Book which included:

- two accidents/incidents that involved staff.
- two accidents that involved members of the public.
- There was one near miss. Action has been taken to prevent this causing any problems in the future.
- There was three other incidents reported.

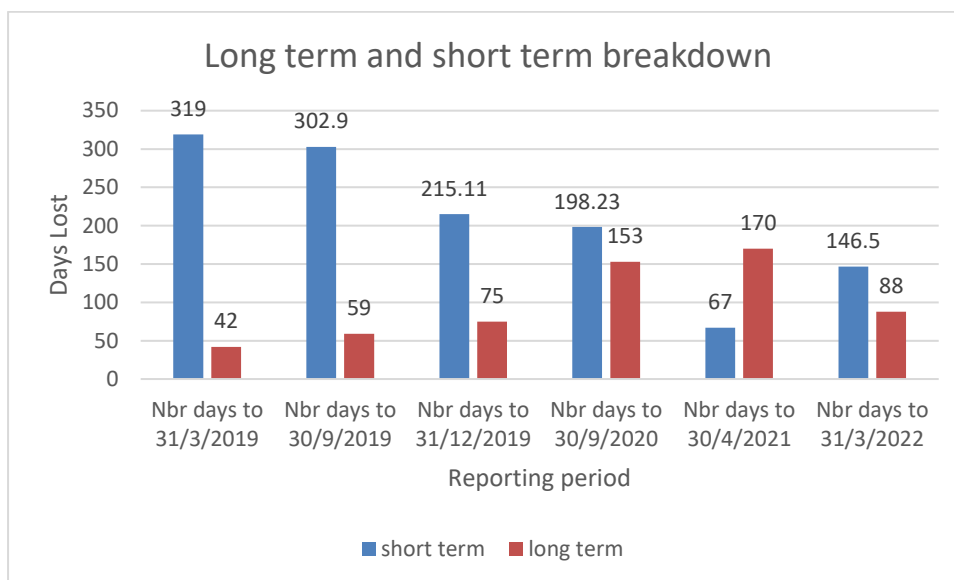
7. Sickness Absence

7.1 Absence statistics for the 12 months up to the end of March 2022 are shown below with the overall short and long term sickness figure remaining at 3.3 days per FTE (Full-time equivalent). The 2020 survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) showed that the UK average level of employee absence in days per FTE in the public sector was 8 days.

The table below shows the comparison with previous years based on sickness days per FTE.

Rolling year to 31/12/2018	Rolling year to 31/3/2019	Rolling year to 30/9/2019	Rolling year to 31/12/2019	Rolling year to 30/9/2020	Rolling year to 30/4/2021	Rolling year to 31/3/2022
6.13	4.93	5.08	3.96	4.93	3.3	3.3

The table below shows the sickness figures quoted since March 2019. Each period looks back over a full 12 months.

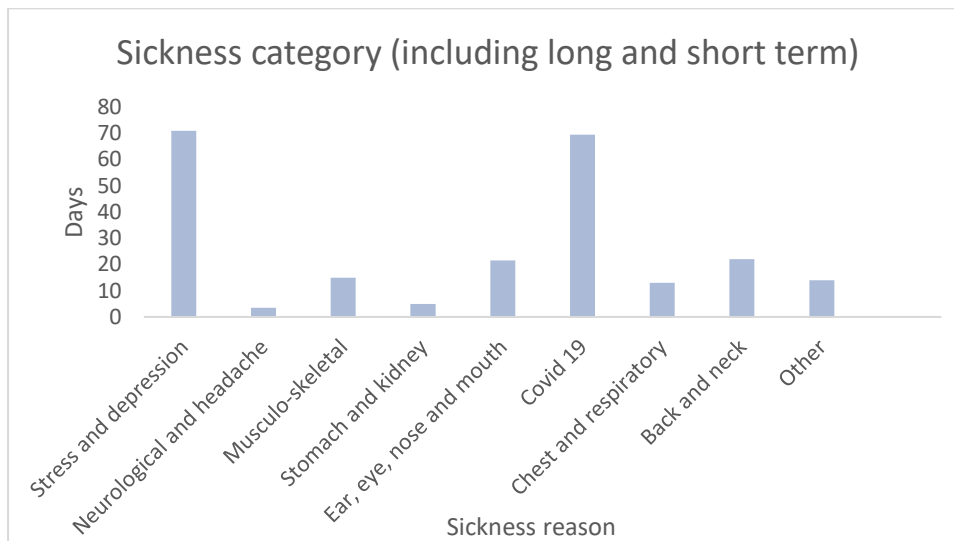


- Long term sickness absence, (absences of 20 days or more) has decreased. This is dependant upon ill health cases being concluded/staff returning to work following a period of long term absence.
- Stress and depression is highest long term sickness absence reason.
- The sickness figures include Covid 19 related absence as recorded on the HR Hub. This accounted for 30% of total sickness absence during this reporting period. It is worth noting that moving forward this figure may change as it depends upon rules/accessibility of obtaining lateral flow tests, with not as many staff testing, unless they have symptoms.
- As a result of Covid 19, short term sickness absence has increased since last reported.
- The 2022 CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey stated 67% of organisations include COVID amongst their top three causes of short term absence.
- Mental ill health and musculo skeletal injuries remain the most common cause of long term absence. However, the Authority continues to support the mental wellbeing of its staff by the provision of a free confidential employee support line to all staff and access to a team of mental health first aiders.
- In January 2022 all staff had access to free online exercise and wellbeing classes. Evidence shows that this service is being accessed by staff.

- Managing wellbeing should remain amongst strong importance for employers and all sickness absence must be accurately recorded on the HR Hub.

Top reason for sickness absence

- Covid 19
- Stress and depression
- Ear, eye, nose and mouth



8. General staff well being

8.1 The Authority continues to offer an Employee Assistance Programme which is a free service for all staff and includes the following:

- 24 hours, 7 days a week confidential Freephone helpline.
- Telephone and face-to-face counselling support.
- Advice and support on matters including work, emotional, personal, relationship, family, legal, financial and health related issues.
- A monthly well-being topic that is promoted to staff via the intranet.

8.2 A series of staff activities, quizzes and events have featured regularly on the Wellbeing page of The Warbler (intranet) as well as articles such as how to look after your mental health during the pandemic.

9. Recommendation:

Members note the report.

Papers:

Cover report – RAPC 485/22

Contact:

Steve Avery

Executive Director

steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk