

RAPC 538/24

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 3 JUNE 2024

ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2023/24

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, September 2014, November 2018 and most recently in June last year.
- 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. The Authority continued to monitor the situation around Covid during the year, ensuring our work continues safely within the Government guidelines and in terms of best practice as well the Authority's own risk assessments and guidelines to ensure the safety of our staff, members, volunteers 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, assisted by the Head of Resources, 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 quarterly and include 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, Corporate Services Manager and the Business Support Officer.
All staff	Responsible for their own Health and Safety whilst at work or on work duties.

3 Covid update - 2023/24

- 3.1 As members will be aware, the pandemic had a significant impact across the world in 2020/21, 2021/22 and continuing into 2022/23 (albeit to a much lesser extent). The measures which the Authority put in place to support staff and our customers in earlier years were relaxed in line with the relaxation and then removal of Government restrictions in favour of Government guidelines and best practice. We continued to follow these guidelines and best practice in 2023/24.

The Executive Leadership Team continued to discuss the implications of the virus as well as new strains which evolved, however, overall, a return to normal operations continued in 2023/24. The hybrid working arrangements continued in 2023/24, following agreement between the relevant staff members and their managers. This system involves a staggered working arrangement between office and home working. The number of staff working in the office steadily increased throughout 2023/24.

- 3.2 Meetings of the Health and Safety Forum took place every six weeks in the period 2020 to early 2022 but have now moved to quarterly meetings in response to the easing of the Covid situation.

- 3.3 Important information on staff wellbeing is provided by the Forum representatives and information cascaded down to staff via the representatives who in turn raise any issues of concern from their respective teams. 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.
- 3.4 A key priority of the hybrid and other working arrangements has been to ensure that the office is adequately staffed during office hours. Staff have been made aware of our Risk Assessments and Guidance regarding the use of the Town Hall offices and additional fire wardens and first aiders have been recruited and trained in response to the new way of working and ensuring staff safety.
- 3.5 Discovery Days which were held in 2020 – 2022, to support staff during the pandemic, continued in 2023 and further discovery days are planned for June 2024. Discovery Days are an annual event, the purpose of which is for staff to spend some time on a selected Discovery Day of their choice to discover more about the New Forest National Park and to gain a deeper understanding about a specific area of work that the Authority undertakes (as well as providing an opportunity to interact with colleagues). These events are conducted in an informal, safe and supportive format.

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. The audit report was published in February 2021.
- 4.2 The executive summary of the audit was also reported to that meeting and a relevant extract of the report is set out below for members' information:

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 have been working through the recommendations arising from the audit and have put in place a timeline for these to be completed. Progress against these recommendations are regularly reported to the Health and Safety Forum. A key recommendation from the audit was the review and update of the Authority's Health and Safety Policy – the new policy was approved by the Authority in June 2023.

5. Other Health and Safety Activity undertaken during 2023/24

- In addition to meetings of the Forum, Health and Safety (H&S) meetings of officers have continued between relevant officers which allow staff to address all health and safety issues as they arise as well as those raised at the Forum meetings.
- All H&S documents are now available in SharePoint in accordance with the review of the Authority's records management. Relevant H&S policies and advice are also viewable on the Authority's intranet.
- Risk is now assessed using the updated risk assessment template. This has standardised assessments providing uniformity and continuity. The template and completed risk assessments are 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 has been finalised by officers and additional fire wardens have been recruited to improve overall cover and identification of H&S concerns as well as the safe evacuation of the building.
- Regular testing of the fire alarm is undertaken and a fire evacuation drill took place in August 2023, NFDC advisors were present and areas of improvement were identified and addressed.
- The Authority's Risk Log (including risks and mitigation relevant to staff H&S) is under regular review by the Executive Board and six monthly by this Committee.
- Our regular All Staff Meetings featured presentations on safe driving at work and being 'tick aware'.

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

- DSE (Display Screen Equipment) online assessment was carried out for those staff who have identified desk, chair or other issue as well as those working at home in line with new ways of working. 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.
- The Authority has entered into an H&S SLA with NFDC as part of the 2024/25 HR SLA renewal. H&S Advisors from NFDC provide advice on a wide range of H&S issues and attend Health and Safety Forum meetings.

- Staff are required to complete an introduction to Health and Safety e-learning course as part of suite of similar on line courses. They will be expected to complete the course by the end of June 2024.

6 Recorded Health and Safety incidents

6.1 During the last 12 months there were 21 recorded incidents logged in the Accident Book which included:

- 5 accidents/incidents that involved staff.
- 5 accidents/incidents that involved members of the public/volunteers.
- 6 near misses.
- 5 incidents of tailgating through the car park barrier at the Town Hall.

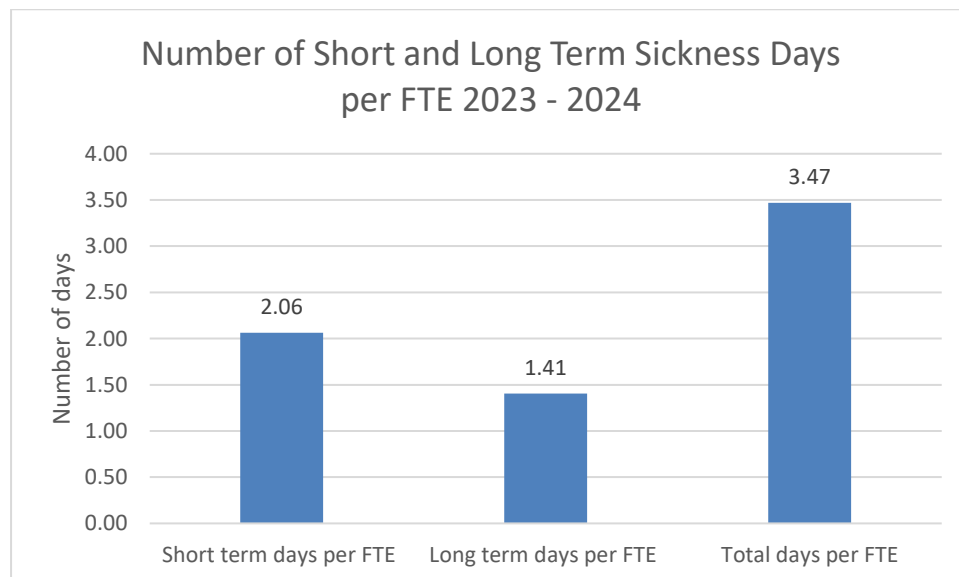
6.2 All recorded incidents are reported to the H&S Forum and where necessary, action taken to minimise the risk of a similar incident occurring in the future.

7. Sickness Absence

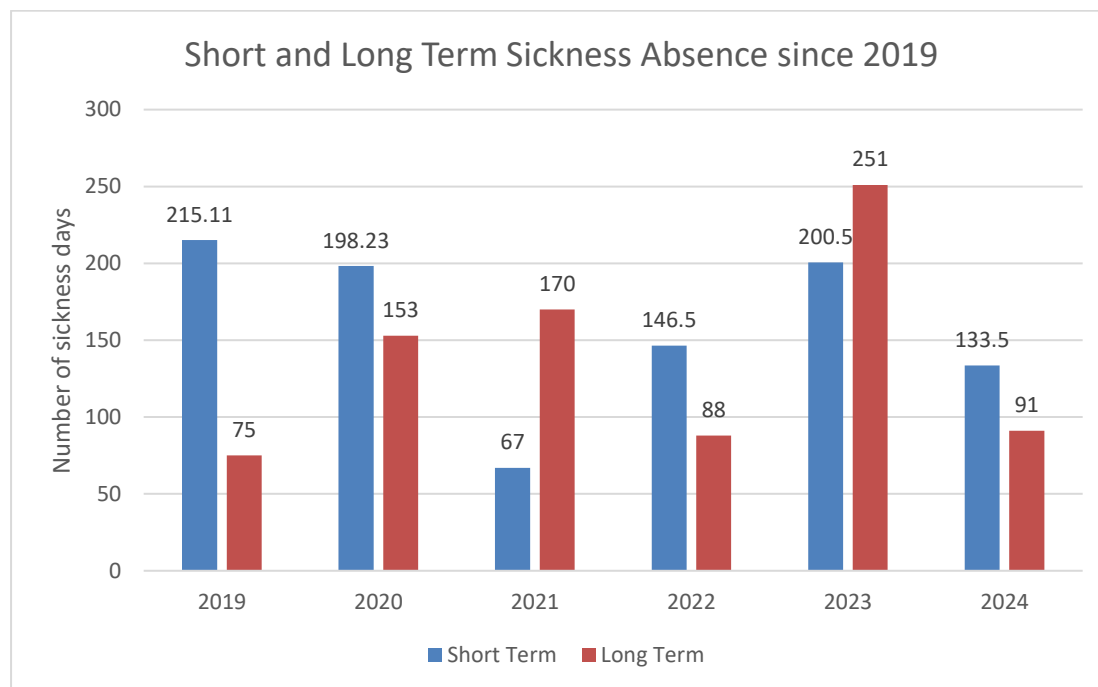
7.1 Absence statistics for the 12 months up to the end of March 2024 are shown below with the overall short and long term sickness figure decreasing from 6.85 days as at 31/3/2023 to 3.47 days per FTE (Full-time equivalent) as at 31/3/2024. This is a drop from 2.49% of working time lost to 1.33% as of 31/3/2024.

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

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
4.93	4.93	3.3	3.3	6.85	3.47



7.2 The table below shows the number of sickness days since March 2019. Each period looks back over a full 12 months and compares short and long term absences.

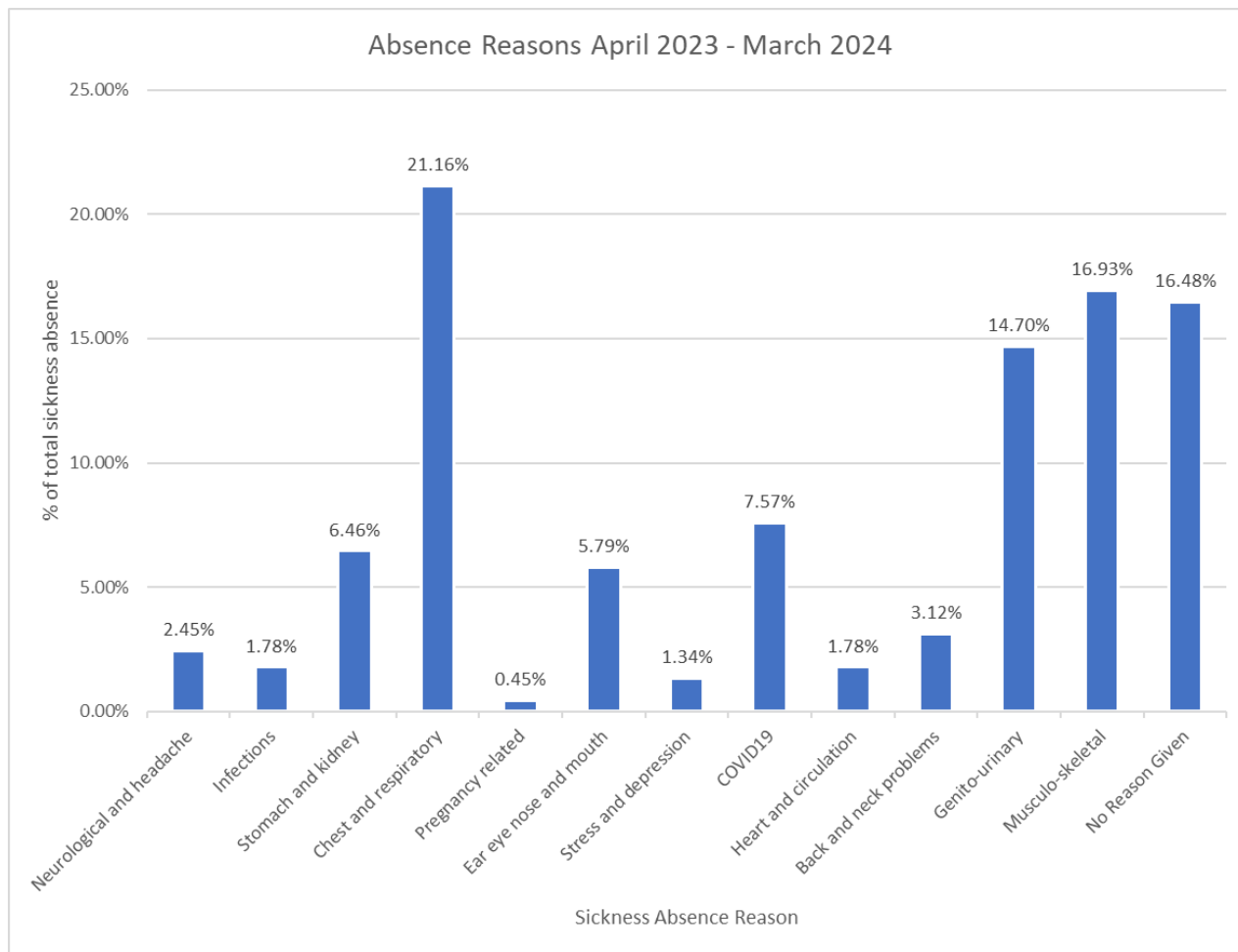


- Long term sickness absence, (absences of 20 days or more) has significantly decreased in the past 12 months. This has been both a drop in short and long term absences.
- Absence because of mental ill health and categorised as stress and depression has substantially decreased in the past 12 months. 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.
- Covid 19 absences continue to be reported, however as per government guidance, these absences are supported and recorded in the same way as any other absence.
- The 2024 CIPD Health and Wellbeing at work report is due to be published in September 2024, which will give up to date comparisons with other public sector employer absence rates. The 2023 Health and Wellbeing report showed a general increase in sickness absence, which is reflected in last years figures.
- Managing wellbeing remains amongst strong importance for us and all sickness absence will continue to be accurately recorded on the HR Hub, with return to work meetings carried out for each period of sickness absence, regardless of the

duration. The purpose of return to work meetings are supportive, to understand why the employee was off, check their fitness to return and agree any support needed to do so.

7.3 Top reasons for sickness absence in the last 12 months are as follows:

- Chest and respiratory (21.16%)
- Musculo skeletal (16.93%)
- No Reason Given (16.48%)



8. General staff wellbeing

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 Our Employee Assistance Programme has launched an online learning platform with a programme of digital wellbeing courses. These aim to provide skills and tools to help staff feel better and stay better, helping to improve and maintain wellbeing by addressing underlying issues that may be negatively impacting on staff. Examples include mindfulness, money worries and sleep issues. Access is via the EAP website.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 The staff survey, undertaken every two years, took place in December 2023. Overall results were very positive, as shared at the briefing with Committee members in early 2024. A staff working group, representing the teams from across the whole Authority, is currently reviewing both the scores and comments from the survey in order to update our People Plan and provide an action plan for agreed short and medium-term changes.

9. Recommendation:

Members are asked note the report.

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