

RAPC 566/25

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 2 JUNE 2025

ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2024/25

Report by: Nigel Stone, Head of Resources

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 2023.
- 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 has continued to ensure our work continues safely, both within all government / regulatory 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 through 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. With Steve Avery having recently left the Authority, operational ownership for Health and Safety has been assigned to the Head of Resources (Nigel Stone), assisted by the Corporate Services Manager.

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) Note: We will need a new H&S Lead Member after July.	Ensures Member input into matters of Health and Safety.
Head of Resources (Nigel Stone)	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, chaired by the Head of Resources and attended by the Corporate Services Manager.
All staff	Responsible for their own Health and Safety whilst at work or on work duties.

3 Health and Safety update for 2024/25

- 3.1 The Executive Leadership Team continued to discuss the implications of the post-covid hybrid working arrangements which continued in 2024/25, following agreement between the relevant staff members and their managers. This system involves a staggered working arrangement between office and home working. It should be noted that the number of staff working in the office has steadily increased throughout 2024/25.
- 3.2 Important information on staff wellbeing is provided by the H&S 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. Significant issues are brought to the attention of staff directly at all-staff meetings or via other all-staff communication channels.

- 3.3 Discovery Days continued in 2024/25 - further discovery days are planned for June 2025. Discovery Days are an annual event, the purpose of which is for staff to spend some time on a selected day of their choice to spend 3-4 hours discovering 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 the Health and Safety Advisor at New Forest District Council was requested to carry out an audit of the Authority's overall Health and Safety provision and identify any gaps or areas for improvement.
- 4.2 An extract from the audit 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 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. The next audit is due in 2026/27.

5. Other Health and Safety Activity undertaken during 2024/25

- In addition to meetings of the Forum, regular Health and Safety (H&S) meetings of officers have continued between relevant H&S 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 an 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.

- Regular testing of the fire alarm is undertaken and a fire evacuation drill took place on 18 September 2024, NFDC advisors were present and areas of improvement were identified and addressed.
- The Authority's Risk Register (including risks and mitigation relevant to 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 in 2024/25.

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 issues, as well as those having issues 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.
- PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) has been made available to protect staff from workplace hazards and who have completed a risk assessment.
- The Authority entered into an H&S Service Level Agreement with NFDC for 2024/25 (and 2025/26). H&S Advisors from NFDC provide advice on a wide range of H&S issues and attend Health and Safety Forum meetings.

6 Recorded Health and Safety incidents

6.1 During the last 12 months there were 19 recorded incidents logged in the Accident Book which included:

- 8 accidents/incidents that involved staff.
- 7 accidents/incidents that involved members of the public/volunteers.
- 3 near misses.
- 1 incidents of a car tailgating through the car park barrier at the Town Hall.

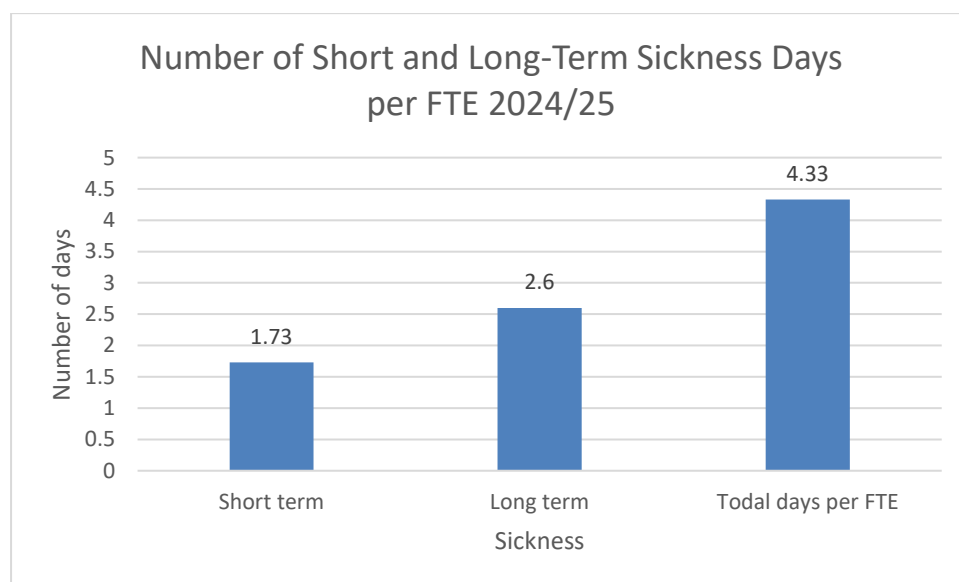
6.2 All recorded incidents are reviewed by relevant officers, reported to the H&S Forum and where necessary, action taken to minimise the risk of a similar incident occurring in the future.

7. Sickness Absence

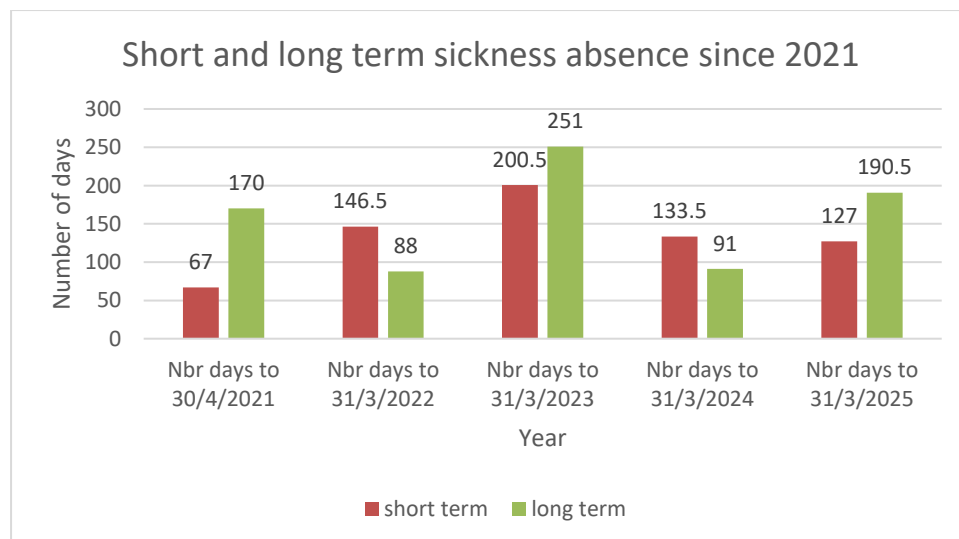
- 7.1 Absence statistics for the 12 months up to the end of March 2025 are shown below with the overall short and long-term sickness figure increasing slightly from 3.47 days as at 31/3/2024 to 4.33 days per FTE (Full-time equivalent) as at 31/3/2025. The cause for this is an increase in long-term absence.

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

2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
3.3	3.3	6.85	3.47	4.33



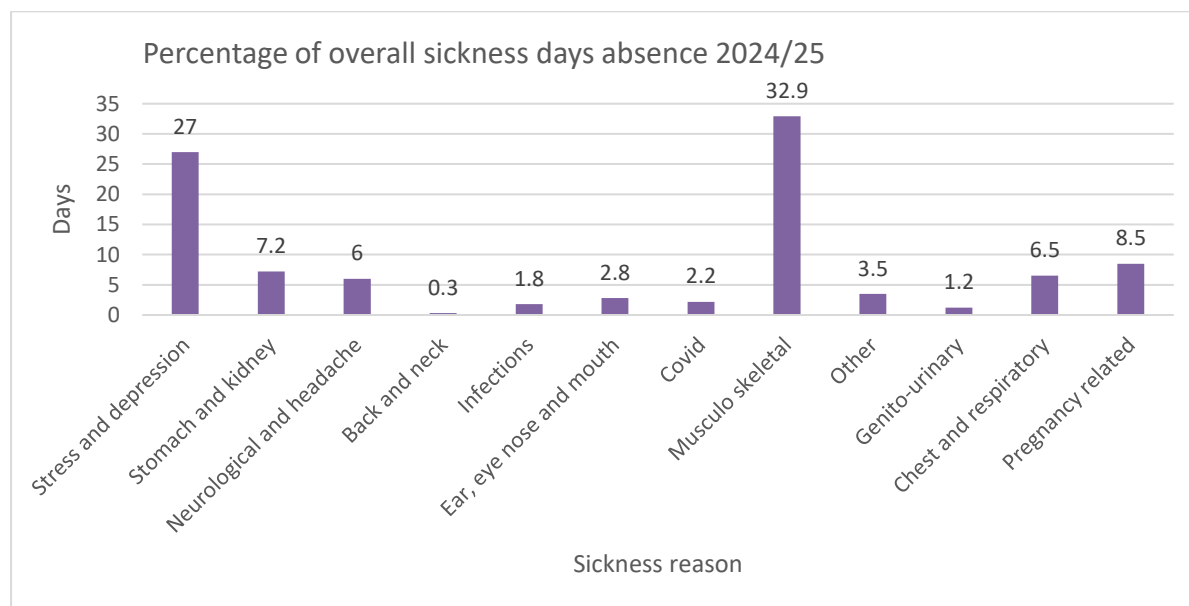
- 7.2 The table below shows the number of sickness days since April 2021. Each period looks back over a full 12 months and compares short and long term absences.



- Long-term sickness absence, (absences of 20 days or more) has increased since last reported. Such cases have been managed within the sickness procedures and resolved.
- Absence because of mental ill health is categorised as stress and depression remains one of the higher sickness absence reasons. The authority has a suite of supportive measures to assist employees who are suffering with poor mental health, including access to mental health first aiders, access to an independent confidential employee & managers support lines and signposting to other supportive organisations.
- Managing wellbeing remains amongst strong importance for us and all sickness absence must 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.

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

- Musculo skeletal
- Stress and depression



8. General staff wellbeing

- 8.1 The Authority continues to offer an Employee Assistance Programme which is a free service for all staff/managers 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 wellbeing 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 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.

9. Recommendation

Members are asked note the report.

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