

**RAPC 596/26**

## **NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 1 JUNE 2026**

#### **ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT 2025/26**

**Report by:** Nigel Stone, Head of Resources and David Stone, Corporate Services Manager

## **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 June 2023. The Policy will be again reviewed towards the end of 2026/27.
- 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, contractors 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 left the Authority during 2025/26, operational ownership for Health and Safety has been assigned to the Head of Resources (Nigel Stone), assisted by the Corporate Services Manager (David Stone).

2.2 The table below sets out the relevant areas of responsibility within the organisation.

| <b>Officer/Group</b>                                | <b>Responsibility</b>  |
|---|--|
| CEO (Alison Barnes)                                 | Overall responsibility for ensuring Health and Safety policy and legal requirements are adhered to at all times.   |
| Lead Member (David Harrison)                        | Ensures Member input into matters of Health and Safety.  |
| Head of Resources (Nigel Stone)                     | Operational ownership for Health and Safety across the Authority.  |
| Corporate Services Manager (David Stone)            | Day-to-day responsibility 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 Advisor (a role provided by NFDC via a Service Level Agreement). |
| 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 2025/26

- 3.1 The Executive Leadership Team continued to discuss the implications of the post-covid 50-50 home/office hybrid working arrangements which continued in 2025/26, following agreement between the relevant staff members and their managers. It should be noted that the number of staff working in the office has increased over recent years and a significant number of staff often spend more than 50% of their working time in the offices.
- 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 up 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 2025/26 - further discovery days are planned for June 2026. 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 spent 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 is periodically 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 most recent 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 policy was approved by the Authority in June 2023. The next audit is due in late 2026/27. In the meantime, officers are continuing to work on gaps identified by the current audit.

#### **5. Other Health and Safety Activity undertaken during 2025/26**

- 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. Towards the end of the current year, training was provided to relevant officers on

drafting and scoring risk assessments and the groups undertook some useful trial assessments.

- Regular testing of the fire alarm is undertaken (weekly) and test evacuations are scheduled every six months.
- The Authority's Risk Register (including risks and mitigation relevant to H&S) is kept 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 first aid in 2025/26. Training was also arranged on the safe use of traction mats for NPA vehicles in off-road or difficult terrain.

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. 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. Further assessments are planned following the office changes proposed to be implemented later in 2026/27 (reducing our overall space at the Town Hall).
- PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) has been made available to protect staff from workplace hazards and who have completed a risk assessment.
- The Authority continues to receive specialist health and safety advice through the H&S Service Level Agreement with NFDC. 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 41 recorded incidents logged in the Accident Book which included:

- 12 accidents/incidents that involved staff
- 17 accidents/incidents that involved members of the public/volunteers
- 10 near misses
- 2 incidents of a car tailgating through the car park barrier at the Town Hall.

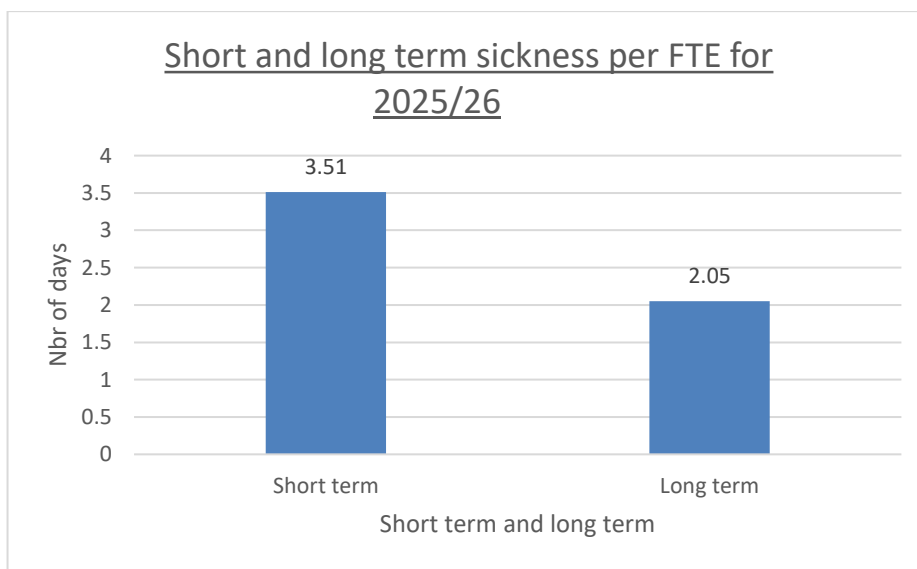
6.2 All recorded incidents are reviewed by relevant officers, reported to the H&S Forum and where necessary, action taken to minimise the risk of a similar incident occurring in the future.

## 7. Sickness Absence

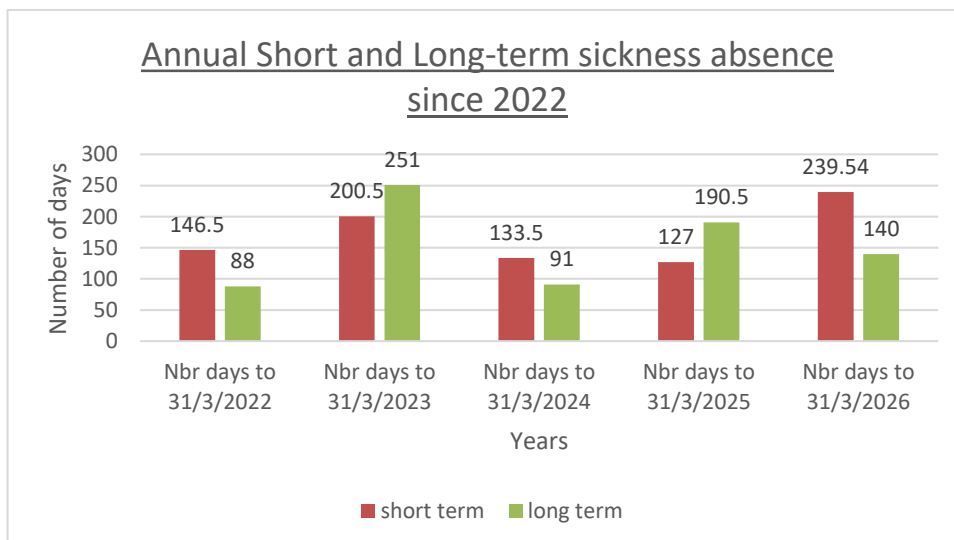
7.1 Absence statistics for the 12 months up to the end of March 2026 are shown below with the overall short and long term sickness figure increasing from 4.3 days as at 31/3/2025 to 5.6 days per FTE (Full-time equivalent) as at 31/3/2026.

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

| 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 | 2025/26 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 3.3     | 6.85    | 3.47    | 4.33    | 5.56    |



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



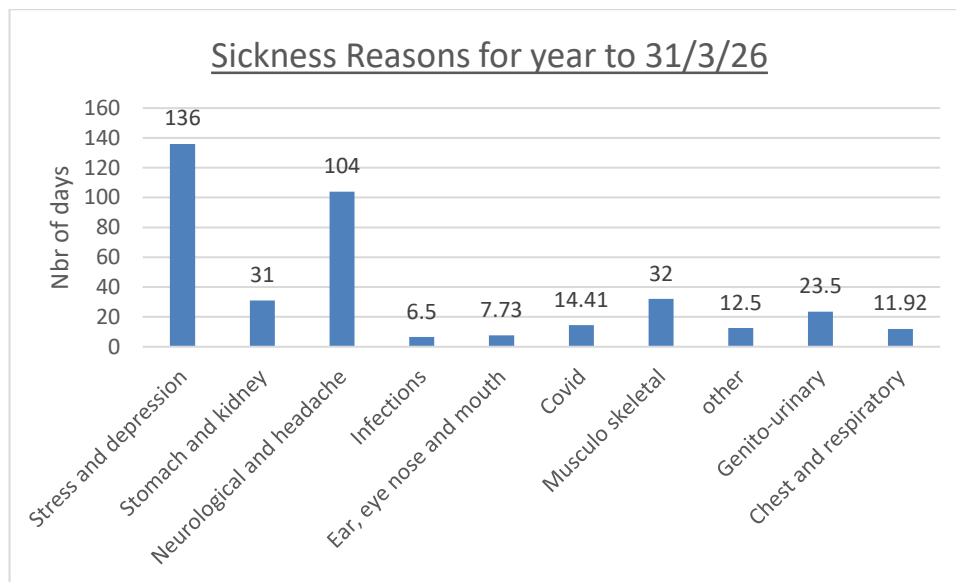
- Given the relatively small size of our organisation, one to two individual cases can disproportionately affect these statistics.
- Managing wellbeing should remain amongst strong importance for employers and all sickness absence must be accurately recorded on the HR Hub and return to work meetings carried out for each period of sickness absence, regardless of the duration.
- Long term sickness absence, those absences of 20 days or more, has reduced since last reported. Such cases have been managed within the agreed sickness procedures.
- Short term sickness absence has increased since last reported, again such cases have been managed within the agreed sickness procedures.
- It is also worth noting that an increase in short term sickness absence also results from employees who may have been absent on long term sickness and are being phased back into the organisation. When working to gradually return to full contractual hours, the employee would record the hours they are not working as sick and be covered by a sicknote or have the option to take annual leave should they wish to do so. A phased return to work would be carefully managed with HR, the manager and the employee.

7.4 The top two reasons given for sickness absence were as follows:

- Stress and depression
- Neurological and headache

Followed by:

- Musculoskeletal
- Stomach and Kidney
- Genito-urinary



- Stress and depression remains one of the higher sickness absence reasons followed by neurological. 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 support line and signposting to other supportive organisations.

## 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.
- 8.4 A series of wellbeing clinic appointments for staff took place early in 2026. These are arranged and funded by the Authority every two years and prove very popular with

staff. Staff have been canvassed for their views on the appointments which will help inform future wellbeing clinics.

## **9. Recommendation**

**Members are asked note the report.**

### **Contact:**

Nigel Stone  
Head of Resources

01590 646655

[nigel.stone@newforestnpa.gov.uk](mailto:nigel.stone@newforestnpa.gov.uk)