

STAFF COMMITTEE



19 MARCH 2012 - 10:00AM

PRESENT: Councillor K G Mayor, Chairman; Councillors J F Clark, P Murphy, K G Peachey, C J Seaton and F H Yeulett.

APOLOGIES: Councillors M I Archer and J R Chambers.

S17/11 MINUTES OF 21 NOVEMBER 2011

The minutes of the meeting of 21 November 2011 were confirmed and signed.

Councillor Yeulett asked for progress in relation to the request for costs associated with redundancies borne by the Council (minute S16/11 refers). The Chairman advised that these costs will be available at the next meeting, which would be after the end of the financial year to enable the exact costs to be provided.

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

S18/11 OVERVIEW OF HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

Members received an overview of the Council's 28 Health and Safety Policies and made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- when the new Government was elected it was intending to reduce the requirements of Health and Safety and is the Council actively reducing and reviewing the requirements? Officers advised that the policies are regularly reviewed and some have been amalgamated;
- the committee receives regular reports on the number of accidents that have occurred in the Council and Fenland does well. Officers advised that the RIDDOR requirements to report any absences over three days is changing to seven days, which will reduce the need for reporting considerably;
- does the Council know what buildings contain asbestos? Officers advised that the Council has a register of buildings that contain it and this is regularly reviewed on an annual basis. Does the Council ever get a situation where it goes to repair a building and suddenly discovers it? Officers advised not to their knowledge, there is a Control of Contractors Policy in existence and any asbestos discovered would be reported immediately. Does the Council test asbestos or is it sent away for testing? Officers advised that it would be sent away for testing as the Council is unable to carry this out in-house;
- cannot some of these Health and Safety Policies that contain synergy be reduced and linked together, such as COSHH and asbestos, unless mandatory and statutory to make the policies simpler, with different regulations being included in the one overarching policy, with the policy referring to these separate elements? Could there not be one Risk Assessment Policy that features all the policies that require risk assessments to feature as part of it, such as Manual Handling, Display Screen Equipment, Needlestick and Sharps, etc? Officers advised that all the policies are based on legislative requirements, and many are required as a result of specific regulations. COSHH and asbestos are two separate regulations and the

Council needs to ensure that it has two separate policies, which are guidelines for staff to use to know how to deal with any instances. The Council does have an action plan to review policies on a regular basis and this can be looked at again to see if they can be reduced further as long as it is not to the detriment of or compromises the Council;

- does the Council have a system where it knows the status of the document, when it was reviewed and the changes highlighted? Officers advised that it does, the policies are reviewed when new legislation is introduced, but also on a three year basis. When a policy is reviewed, the changes are tracked changed and there is a consultation process that is followed;
- what is the process used to regularly assess the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) users? Officers advised that there is a work based assessment form to complete on an annual basis or when the work station changes, with a DSE champion within the team and if any particular problems are identified it will be reported back to the Health and Safety Team;
- what is the Council's policy on eye sight assessments? Officers advised that there is an Eye Test Policy and employees can be provided with vouchers for sight tests and glasses;
- some of the requirements in the Driving at Work Policy are unlawful, such as using mobile telephone in vehicles, so why the need for the policy? Officers advised that mobile phones are provided to staff so this is why this is detailed within the policy. The Council has to follow statutory requirements and guidelines, with the vast majority based on requirements that protect the best interests of the Council. By having these guidelines and statutory based policies in place it does protect the Council's reputation and prevent claims for compensation or fines. These policies are not created to make unnecessary work for staff, but to protect the Council, to ensure that staff take Health and Safety seriously, and the Council needs to demonstrate that it is complying with requirements. Officers acknowledged the view of members that the policies be condensed and compacted;
- is the work carried out in accordance with the Electrical Safety Policy undertaken by the Council's own staff? Officers advised that the Council does have some in-house trained staff and it also has external contractors who carry out some of the work on an annual basis. It was recognised that if the Council is bringing in a third party there is a cost element and if it can be built into someone's job there would be cost savings. Members felt that having Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) trained staff would be cost effective. Officers advised that additional in-house staff will be PAT trained;
- is there an annual fire service assessment? Officers advised that the Council has an internal risk assessment and external inspections for its fire extinguishers and alarms, with fire drills on a regular basis. The point was made that at one time the Fire Service would send someone to inspect premises free of charge. Officers advised that the Fire Service visit premises on an ad-hoc basis or on request, but the Council has to produce its own internal risk inspections. Could the fire extinguishers be checked by in-house staff? Officers advised that this could be investigated, but the Council would need to ensure that staff are competent to do this. Members questioned the motivation of external companies undertaking these checks;
- what is involved in First Aid training? Officers advised that there is a three day training course, with refresher training every three years;
- in relation to Legionella, exposure to this could be huge for the Council, and how does the Council cope with it? Officers advised that the Council undertakes water sampling tests and keeps registers. The leisure centres are the biggest risk areas and it is important to have a

good well-maintained boiling water system;

- it was felt that the Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy and Manual Handling Policy were such policies that could become one covering both areas. Officers advised that this could be looked at;
- when does an employee have to inform the Council that they are expecting? Officers advised that the employee should notify the Council within the first three month period. The Council does require medical confirmation, but this is not normally received until a later stage, and it would initially be verbal confirmation at the earliest opportunity;
- what is the difference between People Policies and Health and Safety Policies? Officers advised that the Health and Safety Policies related specifically to health and safety legislation, and confirmed that opportunities had already been taken to amalgamate and streamline these where possible, and the New and Expectant Mothers Policy is to be included within the People Policy covering this subject;
- if anybody is working in an environment where it is really noisy, is it mandatory to wear ear defenders? Officers advised in certain circumstances, such as using a pneumatic drill;
- does the Council cover itself for employees bringing in and using there own Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)? Officers advised that the Council supplies any PPE that is required;
- does the Council pay or the insurance company for a competent person to check the pressure systems? Officers advised that there are certain things that the insurance company requires and this is a certificated inspection for which the Council pays;
- the Smoking at Work Policy, does it cover only smoking, which is illegal in buildings, or is it intended to cover something else? Officers advised that the policy exists to cover all sites that the Council covers detailing where staff can or cannot smoke;
- it is appreciated that Violence and Aggression at Work is Health and Safety, but this also links to disciplinary under People Policies. Officers advised that this policy covers members of the public being violent or aggressive to staff;
- generally the policies are fairly complex and common sense, how are these policies embraced by staff? Officers advised that the Health and Safety culture at the Council is very good and staff do generally embrace it;
- it is understood why the Council need these policies as it can be seen as an easy target, but it needs to look at cost effective ways of delivering aspects within these policies, such as maintaining and checking fire extinguishers. If the Government keep relaxing Health and Safety requirements, the Council should not always do things as it has always been undertaken like that and look at simplifying its procedures;
- officers advised that Health and Safety presents risks to the Council in relation to reputation and compensation, and if the Council is found wanting in terms of managing Health and Safety issues unfortunately under Corporate Manslaughter the HSE can make staff and members liable, but the Council has a good track record and it is recognised that Health and Safety is managed well through the Health and Safety Team. The Chief Executive gave thanks, on behalf of Corporate Management Team, to the Health and Safety Team for the fantastic work that they undertake.

Members noted the information provided and requested that investigations be made into condensing and compacting the Health and Safety Policies.

S19/11 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES STAFFING REVIEW

Members considered proposals to modernise working practices within the Cleansing and Workshop Teams of Environmental Services to enable reduced fleet costs and improved efficiencies. Members were:

- informed of the circumstances and details of the proposed changes;
- of the annual efficiency savings that the revised structure would deliver;
- of all the comments and feedback put forward during the consultation process.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses from officers.

Councillor Murphy gave his personal thanks to the Corporate Director, Head of Environmental Services and all staff involved for the hard work that has been undertaken at arriving at these proposals. This sentiment was endorsed by the Chief Executive.

Decided that:

1. **the report and annual efficiency savings achieved as a result of the proposals be noted;**
2. **the proposals, including the deletion of posts and creation of one new post, be approved.**

(Members resolved to exclude the public from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

12.10pm

Chairman