

Health and Safety Paper for Health, Safety & Wellbeing Steering Group January 2024

*Prepared by
The Corporate Health and Safety Unit*

Service Update

At the previous Steering Group meeting September 2023, the Group were advised of the recruitment exercise to appoint a permanent Strategic Manager for the Health and Safety Service. Following a successful interview, we are pleased to confirm the appointment of Daniel Thomas who had been seconded to the Service Manager post since February 2022.

Regrettably, Senior Officers Francesca Benson and Steve Dorrall both resigned and have since left the authority. In addition, we also said goodbye to admin colleagues Hannah Williams and Jaci Tyler.

Steve had worked for the local authority for 19 years, during that time he has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication and the highest professional standards. Steve was a well-liked and respected member of the team, and a hugely experienced and knowledgeable health and safety professional, we wish him well in his new role at North Somerset Council.

Prior to the forming of our new council, Francesca quickly established herself as an integral member of the LGR H&S sub-workstream. Francesca had an infectious personality, was always positive and eager to help colleagues in the team and our wider workforce, her wealth of knowledge and experience was an asset to the team, as I am sure it will be for her new employer.

The departure of key personnel resulted in a review of the council's '16, High' Strategic Risk, subsequently the risk was increased to '25, Very High'.

Action has been taken to stabilise the Service and prevent further decline. Following a successful request to the Establishment and Recruitment Control Board, the H&S Service advertised four positions in December.

Pam Price and Ian Haim were appointed into the Senior Safety Officer roles vacated by Steve and Francesca. Charlotte Strang was appointed Safety Officer; a position Pam had been seconded to since January 2022. Finally, Benjamin Smith was appointed Principal Safety Officer, a post which has remained vacant since Jayne Slocombe left the authority in November 2022.

Health and Safety Governance Structure

We are delighted to confirm the council's corporate Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Boards are established and meeting regularly. Since our last report to the Group, we have supported the Community Services Board, and Strategy Workforce, Localities, Resource, and Corporate Services Board in developing Terms of Reference (TOR) for their meetings. Over the coming weeks we will be working to establish TORs for the Climate & Place Board, and Childrens, Adults, and Public Health Board.

Apart from the Children's, Adults and Public Health Board, the Boards have established their membership, attendance from senior managers and Directors is an embedded practice.

The Children's, Adults and Public Health Board met for the first time in November. Unfortunately, attendance was made up of one officer from each Directorate rather than attracting key colleagues from each service that can bring experiences, projects, issues, or concerns to the board to stimulate activity and address issues such as better engagement with the Peoplesafe devices, incident reporting or training requirements for staff (e.g., risk assessment, personal safety, and violence).

Concerns pertaining to the above were raised with Board members who are actively seeking to identify additional members who can represent Adults and Children's.

Under the direction of Alyn Jones, the H&S Service will be defining operating principles for the Boards with ELT to ensure there is a clear understanding within the organisation of how the Boards will be overseen and delivered.

A general reminder, all actions arising from the Board meetings can be viewed on the council's [H&S Governance Bi Report](#).

Health and Safety System

At our last meeting, the H&S Service provided a detailed overview of the contractual arrangements for the two H&S Systems employed by the council and managed by the service.

In our endeavours to implement a singular system across the corporate body, the Health and Safety Service issued a paper to the ICT Project Governance Board in October detailing the three options available. Going into the meeting, we had previously suggested our Service preference would be an in-house solution utilising Microsoft Power Platform technology. In considering the recommendation, ICT enlisted the support of a colleague from Strategy and Performance who completed an independent review.

Consequently, the ICT Project Governance Board reached agreement to pursue the recommendation of an in-house system as the preferred solution. However, the decision to proceed came with a caveat that further discovery work would need to be undertaken to



review the system specification and required functionality to ensure the system could be delivered in accordance with our existing license permissions, thus avoiding additional costs.

Owing to the technical complexities involved, we are proceeding with app design which is aiding our understanding of the system requirements. We have developed and are testing a COSHH Assessment module, a Hazard reporting module is ready for testing, and the accident/incident reporting module is in development.

The discovery work is ongoing; this is a complex project for ICT as they have not previously designed a Power App to replace a system of this size and scope. As such a full and final decision to proceed with the in-house solution has not been agreed, conversations are taking place on a weekly basis, and we are hopeful of reaching a conclusion as soon as possible.

On 11th January ICT appointed a Project Manager which is a further positive indication that the progress made is likely to result in a system built by Somerset Council for Somerset Council.

Core Health and Safety Training

The Health and Safety Service are continuing to liaise with Organisation Development (OD) to agree mandatory 'core' H&S training courses for Somerset Council employees. A draft of the 'Training Paper' discussed at our last meeting is currently being reviewed by Dawn Bettridge.

The Climate and Place (C&P) Board has taken proactive action in volunteering to engage in a pilot exercise which involves adopting the core H&S courses across C&P. We are currently working with OD and Kirsty Larkins to plan a rollout of the courses; an essential part of this work involves setting up the learning profiles to ensure training requirements are correctly assigned and accurate compliance reports can be generated.

Both H&S and OD are extremely grateful to C&P colleagues as the pilot will result in a more efficient wider rollout of mandatory courses across the council. As a reminder, the 'core' mandatory H&S courses are detailed below.

- Fire Safety (all staff)
- Manual Handling (all staff)
- Display Screen Equipment (all staff who have been issued a laptop or desktop device)
- An Introduction to Risk Assessment (all managers)
- Managing Health and Safety (all managers)
- Introduction to Health and Safety (all new starters)
- IOSH Safety for Executives and Directors (Excluded from C&P pilot)

Policy Development

At the HR Committee in October, the following policies were approved.

- Safety Action Notices (Review of legacy SCC policy)
- Confined Spaces (New policy)
- New and Expectant Parents (Review of legacy SCC policy)
- Working Safely at Height (Review of legacy SCC policy)
- Biological Agent, Infection Control and Blood-borne Viruses (Review of legacy SCC policy)
- Water Assets (New policy)
- Working Outside in the Sun and Extremes of Heat and Cold (Review of legacy SCC policy)

We are currently waiting for ICT to publish the policies on our website, once published, comms will be released via Dragon's Pen and the Leadership Briefing. We respectfully ask Board representatives to ensure each Board is made aware of the policies, and managers are instructed to familiarise themselves with requirements of the policies.

In November we consulted members of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Group and Trade Union representatives at the LGR JNF Group in policy reviews of the Legionella, Slips & Trips, and Food Safety policies. The intention was to present these policies at the January HR Committee. Regrettably, despite following the agreed process, we were unable to obtain policy report sign-off from all the required approvers. Therefore, the policies have been deferred to the next meeting scheduled for 26th March.

Following the recent recruitments and the delays in obtaining policy report sign-off, we have updated our policy review forward plan, linked [here](#).

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Assessment and Training

We are continuing with our efforts to replace Somerset Council's legacy DSE system. The initial soft launch has shown promise, 65% of employees were able to complete their assessments without DSE assessor intervention. In publishing the DSE Assessment app, we have developed a [Bi Report](#) which is available on our Intranet site.

In January and February, we are delivering training to 70+ DSE Assessor colleagues who will support employees in addressing issues which remain outstanding following completion of the assessment form.

In circumstances where an employee has been unable to self-resolve, a DSE assessor will be assigned to that user. The assessor will then contact them to ask questions, offer advice, and if needed will provide a face-to-face assessment. Broadly speaking, we anticipate colleagues supporting the DSE process would not be asked to travel and therefore would support by following up on cases in the locations where they are based. CHSU officers will follow-up on DSE assessments completed by home workers and cases escalated by DSE assessors outside of the team who are unable to fully solve the user's issues.



Once we have concluded the DSE Assessor engagement, we will release comms via the Leadership Briefing and Dragon's Pen informing colleagues of the changes to the DSE assessment process.

DSE Awareness training is one of the proposed mandatory 'core' H&S courses. We have worked with OD to develop the course which will be incorporated into the Climate and Place training pilot. Although this course will not be considered mandatory until the OD Training Paper is approved, we will promote the benefits of the course to staff when we release comms outlining the new DSE assessment process.

Fire Safety Order Legal Update

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places strict duties on those who have control of premises to take a robust approach to identifying and managing risks within their buildings. Owing to changes in legislation which came into effect on 1st October 2023, the Health and Safety Service delivered a series of legal updates to inform stakeholders in Strategic Asset Management of the changes.

This training sets out the amendments along with the new articles and the associated actions that are required to prevent unlimited fines for non-compliance under Article 27.

- Articles 9 and 11 – Requirement to record.
- New Article 21A – Information to residents (domestic premises).
- New Article 22 (A1) – Information to other responsible persons (RP).
- New Article 22A – Information to new responsible person.
- New Article 22B – Co-operation with accountable persons.
- Article 27 – Unlimited fines for non-compliance.

Facilities Management (FM) have been provided with a comprehensive checklist that sets out the amendments along with the new articles and the associated actions that are required to prevent unlimited fines for non-compliance under Article 27.

FM are progressing well and have produced a number of template letters and procedures that will be sent out to SC tenants to explain what actions are required. Updates are being shared with the Strategy, Workforce, Localities, Resources, and Corporate Services Board, which in conjunction with the Health and Safety Service are monitoring the progress of this work.

Fire Risk Assessments

Fire risk assessments are being completed on the new Civica Asset Management system following its launch in the summer of 2023.

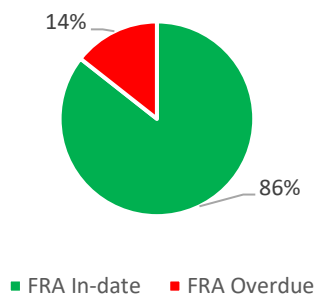
The Health and Safety Service are now responsible for fire risk assessments of 271 premises. This figure accounts for 12 new premises Somerset Council acquired in 2023, along with approximately 45 former district premises.

The September report detailed 91% compliance with our fire risk assessment programme. This figure has since dropped to 86%. 232 premises of our combined corporate and educational estate have in-date fire risk assessments in place, there are a further 39 (25 Corporate & 14 School) premises operating without in date assessments.

Adapting to the new Civica system, adopting additional legacy district premises, and the introduction of the school Core Offer were contributing factors to the drop in our compliance. We had planned to address this prior to the end of the financial year, with January and February being a quieter period. However, the resignations of Steve Dorrall and Francesca meant this was no longer feasible.

Our external fire risk assessor Risk Monitor is being deployed to assist with assessments for the majority of the 39 outstanding sites. We collaborated closely with colleagues from across Strategic Asset Management to consider the feasibility of using alternative suppliers previously employed by the legacy districts. However, in obtaining quotes, Risk Monitor were the most competitive and familiar with our premises.

Overall FRA Completion





Hand Arm Vibration (HAVS) Review.

Due to a RIDDOR report submitted in April 2023, where a member of staff is believed to have suffered from a medical condition associated with the use of vibration emitting equipment, throughout the remainder of 2023, the Health and Safety Service carried out a detailed fact-finding project on hand-arm vibration procedures and practices that are currently used within Somerset Council (SC).

The Health & Safety Service conducted an organisation wide survey to review the use, and risk control measures pertaining to the management of vibration emitting equipment used within the authority. With this data we can identify areas that require support and areas that are showing best practice. It is our aim to standardise our approach to control the hazards presented by vibration emitting equipment.

The project looked at the following processes:

- Occupational health (OH) surveillance.
- Training provided to Staff.
- Current Hand-arm vibration risk assessments.
- SC Hand arm vibration policy (HS036)
- Staff monitoring.
- Equipment magnitude data held by services.
- Equipment vibration testing.
- Equipment servicing and maintenance.

We are in the process of finalising a detailed report which will be issued to relevant Service Directors outlining the information produced by the project as well as actions and recommendations required to achieve compliance with SC [HS036 Hand Arm Vibration Policy](#) and the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance for [Hand-arm vibration - L140 \(hse.gov.uk\)](#).

An essential recommendation arising from the project will be the adoption of a HAVs Power App which has been designed to record and monitor staff vibration exposure. 17 employees have been engaged in testing since October, a total of 20 different tools are being recorded by employees, and we have captured over 250 hours of tool use. The implementation of the app is considered essential to increasing our ability to manage vibration exposure with the authority. Full justification for this recommendation will be included in the report issued to the relevant Service Directors.

People-Safe

We are continuing efforts to align all existing sub-accounts, their management and device users into the new Council organisational structure. The project team has a fortnightly service review meeting with the account manager for Peoplesafe to support the development of this work and provide a direct link for escalating and managing any account, device, or administration issues.

Phase one of the Peoplesafe project was initiated in the summer last year, ahead of the contract extension renewal in September 2023. This involved an audit of all devices already in the business to determine if they were still required, if they were missing, and identify any outstanding orders not fulfilled. This work was completed September 2023. Some post-audit actions were identified including return of unwanted devices and coordinating replacement of missing devices, and this work was also completed.

Phase two of the Peoplesafe project is underway, with several key priorities:

1. Design and implement a clear and manageable process to deal with the administration of Lone Worker Devices.

A priority for the autumn was to create a new process in-house for teams to request new devices, return devices, report missing devices. This work has been completed with new MS forms created as well as a dedicated [intranet page](#) for lone worker devices as a hub with information for both users and sub-account managers, administrators e.g. FAQs, training links, forms, guidance documents.

2. Develop and implement a framework for the restructure of sub-accounts and management.

The sub-accounts are currently structured on the Peoplesafe portal as per legacy Council areas and organisational team structures. This needs to be restructured to reflect the new organisational structure e.g., directorates, services and sub-accounts aligned to the business area under each of these.

Each sub-account needs to be reviewed by the appropriate manager to ensure that the device user information is up to date, notifying the CHSU of any changes or inaccuracies. The project team is working with sub-account managers (where known) to start making these changes, however, as previously reported, the audit identified some big gaps in sub-account management and administration personnel, identifying sub-account managers and administrators is a priority piece of work. This is not only required in being able to progress the restructure of sub-account landscape, and to ensure that all device users have clear lines of reporting any device issues and personal data changes within their business areas, but also to ensure that the team composition of users within sub-accounts, and the team escalation details for any alerts, is reviewed, refreshed, and kept up to date.

Work has been underway to identify personnel to fill these gaps however the ongoing and delayed restructure of the organisation has made this work more challenging to progress. An email was therefore sent to all Directors with service device users in late



November escalating the urgency of this work and asking them to identify named individuals to be the responsible sub-account managers, and who the CHSU can work with in restructuring the sub-accounts. The project team has created an outline of the key responsibilities of sub-account managers / administrators along with a sway presentation to highlight key considerations for action in the review of their sub-accounts to support the restructure work.

3. Migrate all existing portal data to new Peoplesafe Portal.

There is an additional timebound driver for securing sub-account managers and re-structure which comes from Peoplesafe direct. Peoplesafe has informed the council of the need to migrate our account onto a new online portal as of 12th February 2024.

A critical requirement pre data migration is that the sub-account landscape must be confirmed for bulk upload along with named sub-account managers and updated team escalation details.

4. Agree and implement a standardised device unit configuration setting for all devices.

The legacy Councils had differing configuration settings for devices, which in practice meant some devices had slightly different functionality with action buttons and features applied. The project team has recently agreed the configuration settings for all devices be applied as a standardised setting, and this will take effect by the beginning of February, if not earlier. This will not have significant changes for device users and will give the majority improved provision with their device functionality. Changes will be communicated to all sub-account managers and users in advance.

5. Design and implement a training plan to increase device usage and support sub-account managers/administrators.

Usage rates for devices remains low, which is unacceptable given it is allocated based on identified need as part of PPE. Data from the Peoplesafe portal on 03/01/2024 showed that of the 1274 users registered on the system, only 166 were active users (with recorded activity) and 885 were dormant (this means no recorded activity in a 3-month period). 223 were inactive (not linked to a device) which could mean that user profiles exist on the portal for staff that no longer require devices or have left the organisation – this data needs to be reviewed and updated asap.

The low device usage rates, and feedback from some sub-account managers that users would benefit from device operation training, reinforces the importance of scheduling refresher training. It is envisaged this will be delivered by both Peoplesafe (initially in the form of 1 or 2 drop-in sessions) and further supported by the CHSU team with follow up virtual sessions. The CHSU team is small, and face-to-face training is too ambitious to roll out given the limited resources. The virtual training sessions will therefore be designed as interactive sessions and encourage device users to bring devices to the session with them.

The project team is also mindful that with new sub-account managers/administrations some time also needs to be allocated to onboard those personnel, but with a new portal about to go live, this may be better scheduled for after the new portal is in place. In the

meantime, there is e-learning available in the form of Peoplesafe guidance videos and PDFs for all users and sub-account managers to review relating to the existing portal, with device operating guidance and portal administration information.

Internal and External Enforcements

There has been no enforcement action taken by either the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the Devon & Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) against the council or any of its Maintained Schools.

Corporately, the Health and Safety Service has not issued any Safety Action Notices.

Following findings of H&S audits and/or Fire Risk Assessments, the following schools are currently on the education escalation procedure.

- Rode & Norton St Phillip (Direction Level 2)

Health and Safety Activity Report

From April 2023 – December 2023 the Health and Safety Service has:

- Undertaken 81 Audits/Inspections.
- Completed 34 Fire Risk Assessments.
- Delivered 88 Training courses to 652 employees.
- Published 79 Communications via comms channels such as Schools newsletter, Dragon's Pen, Leadership Briefing, and the H&S Intranet site.

Wellbeing Update SC

Support requests coming into the Working Well Mailbox are very low, this may change as restructures are announced, but could also be due to individuals seeking support externally. The Wellbeing team will focus future comms on the impartiality and confidentiality of the service and encourage managers to ensure that they have made their teams aware of what support is available.

The new roles of Working Well Advocate and Mental Health Peer Supporter have now launched, any similar voluntary roles from our predecessor organisations have now ended.

The launch article with the role spec and sign-up document for the Working Well Advocates is below. Take-up is low although it is early days for this to be successful it is important that the advocates represent a wide range of service areas.

[Working Well Advocates \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

The Mental Health Peer Supporters have been recruited from our pre-existing volunteers and will be those who take the support requests from the Working Well mailbox the role specification can be seen by following the link below.

[HR & OD - Mental Health Peer Supporter .pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Wellbeing and equalities training continues for employees without access to IT we have delivered to nearly all staff in Transporting Somerset and will be moving on to other teams this year.

Employees without access to IT because they were not issued with a device when they joined the organisation can now request an SC email account through their managers, this is processed via Halo. This will allow them access to comms, policy information, employee support networks, the wellbeing site, and staff benefits information. They can do this via their personal mobile phone, home computer or a library computer. If their account is inactive for three months, then access will be reviewed to ensure that budgets are being managed effectively for this.

Feedback from the Working Well Advocates from their last monthly meeting

- Comms around wellbeing from SLT sounds insincere because it is often copied and pasted from previous comms or put at the bottom of messaging as an afterthought.
- People are in shock, there is an information void, management and senior management do not have answers even if you do go to them, you cannot function unless you distance yourself from it.
- Managers are feeling anxious themselves.
- Having weekly informal meetings and keeping conversation open can help prevent relationships from breaking down. Toxic conversations and mistruth need to be challenged.
- Some teams are able to do more partnership working since we have come together and are enjoying working with new people and supporting teams who had been previously overstretched.
- Advocates are happy to reach out and check in with those who may be isolated or struggling even if they are not in their direct team, we spoke about increasing their visibility to allow for this.

Corporate and Education Accidents and Incidents

To be presented by Pam Price at the meeting.

Daniel Thomas

Health and Safety Strategic Manager

15th January 2024