

## Audit Objective





To provide advice on the Council’s strategic arrangements in place to oversee corporate H&S risks in line with HSE’s guidance on leading H&S Management.

Assurance Opinion	Number of Actions		Risks Reviewed	Assessment
	Priority	Number		
<h1>Advisory</h1>	Priority 1	-	Following the Local Government Reorganisation process, the new Council does not have an embedded health and safety culture which in turn impacts on the Council’s ability to achieve its health and safety objectives.	<b>High</b>
	Priority 2	5		
	Priority 3	-		
	Total	5		

## Background and Scope

This review has undertaken a high-level view of H&S governance at the newly formed Somerset Council, with a focus on understanding the culture towards H&S within the new Authority. To achieve this we undertook a high-level review of some of the governance arrangements that were in place and obtained an assessment on culture through a survey that was issued to all staff. A separate report summarising the survey results has been shared with management. We developed questions through reading HSE guidance and has been themed according to what HSE state is the largest influences on safety culture ([HSE – Organisational Culture](#)). Survey results were compared with our high-level view of governance and findings have been reported as part of appendix 1 together with actions to be undertaken.

## Reportable findings

	A new Health and Safety Governance structure has been agreed by the Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Steering Group (HSWSG), however this was still not fully in operation at the point of undertaking this audit. As part of the new governance arrangements, the Human Resources Committee will have Member oversight for H&S however they had not received any updates since the formation of the new Council resulting in very minimal Member oversight of H&S arrangements at the Council. The H&S Manager has confirmed that he is engaging with the relevant portfolio holder, which ensures there is some involvement.
	The H&S policies available on the intranet, whilst some have been updated for the new Council, others still require updating to reflect changes to the governance structure such as having the HSWBs. The responsibilities document should be reviewed to ensure it reflects expected outcomes, for example it includes the requirement for the H&S Champion to prepare a six-monthly report for the Audit Committee on H&S performance, but this is not currently happening. We also identified out of date H&S information on two office walks in Deane House, where H&S notice board is out of date and at County Hall where a floor plan dated Sep’88 was on the wall showing locations of fire safety equipment. Despite some documents needing updating we did find that there is clear signposting online to H&S advice and signposting to the H&S team.
	There are no health and safety performance indicators included in corporate performance reporting or targets for the management of health and safety at Somerset Council. We were advised that some H&S information on Fire Risk Assessment compliance and accidents is shared with the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Steering Group, wider performance information is not shared within the Council’s performance management framework. It is intended to develop performance reporting further within the new HSWBs.
	Although the Council has recently set up management health and safety training together with training on risk assessments, there is currently no monitoring of staff completion rates or escalation for when staff do not complete the courses. It is intended to monitor training through the health and wellbeing boards once fully established. There has not been any Health and Safety training for Members delivered by the Health and Safety team. The H&S team is aware of the need and wants to move this forward but have not been able to get this prioritised with Democratic Services.

## High level survey findings

### Observations from staff survey

Survey results across five themes showed the most favourable responses were for 'Compliance with procedures' with the least favourable being 'Communication.' The most negatively answered question was on 'Reports showing the Council's H&S Performance are shared with staff' which 37% of staff disagreed with, 21% also disagreed with the statement 'I receive periodic training on H&S.' Most positively, 88% of staff agreed with the statement that they 'are comfortable with raising any H&S issues.'

Analysing results across legacy organisations, directorates and offices shows a very mixed view. For example, 58% of respondents based at Colley Lane answered negatively to the statement 'there is a strong and active commitment from senior managers towards H&S' compared with the 16% collectively – the legacy Council staff of Sedgemoor also had a similar score with 41% answering negatively and Communities as a directorate with 35%.

Theme	Question	Average score (LOW -2 to 2 HIGH)
Employee Involvement	I am comfortable with raising any health and safety related issues.	1.53
Employee Involvement	I always report safety incidents.	1.47
Compliance with procedures	I am aware of the relevant health and safety procedures for my role.	1.45
Training and competence	I feel confident and competent to manage health and safety issues within my role.	1.43
Compliance with procedures	I feel safe working for Somerset Council.	1.39
Management Commitment and Style	My manager treats health and safety matters with importance.	1.22
Compliance with procedures	I do not see regular violations of health and safety practice within my work.	1.2
Organisational learning	I feel like Health and Safety is important at Somerset Council	1.17
Employee Involvement	I feel able to be involved in managing health and safety risks.	1.14
Employee Involvement	I know where to access Health and Safety advice.	1.14
Employee Involvement	I know where to report any H&S issues.	1.12
Training and competence	I have received health and safety training relevant to my role. E.g. safe working procedures	1.1
Compliance with procedures	I am confident that the health and safety risks in my area have been properly defined and are being managed.	1.03
Employee Involvement	I can easily access the H&S policies and relevant procedures for my work.	0.98
Management Commitment and Style	I believe senior management will take any H&S issues I raise seriously.	0.94
Organisational learning	I believe the Council learns from past health and safety incidents	0.89
Communication	I feel that Somerset Council promotes both physical and mental health and safety.	0.86
Communication	Managers communicate with us and listen to us about health and safety	0.85
Communication	The organisation keeps me up to date on H&S matters.	0.83
Management Commitment and Style	I believe that senior management are committed to ensuring any health and safety issues are quickly resolved.	0.82
Communication	Health and Safety is discussed periodically within team meetings.	0.74
Management Commitment and Style	There is a strong and active commitment from senior managers towards H&S.	0.72
Training and competence	I receive periodic training on health and safety.	0.7
Management Commitment and Style	Senior managers visibly follow H&S practice.	0.68
Communication	Reports showing the Council's Health and Safety performance are shared with staff.	-0.05

Question Theme	Average score
Compliance with procedures	1.27
Employee Involvement	1.23
Training and competence	1.08
Organisational learning	1.03
Management Commitment and Style	0.87
Communication	0.65

Answers	Scores
Agree	2
Slightly Agree	1
Neutral	0
Slightly disagree	-1
Disagree	-2

Across all themes, Compliance with Procedures and Employee Involvement were highest and potentially shows staff engagement towards health and safety matters is relatively positive albeit with some room for improvement. Management Commitment and Style as well as Communication are areas for most development based on the survey results and highlights the need for the clear golden thread within the organisation on health and safety matters, this finding may also link to our review findings of there being no corporate performance information on H&S and minimal reporting to Members.

## Appendix 1

## Findings & Action Plan

Finding 1.1 – New H&S Governance arrangements not fully embedded	Action												
<p>Whilst there is a new Governance Structure in place for H&amp;S that is designed to work across directorates, there is a need to define the Council’s own Health and Safety Strategy assessing where it currently is, where it wants to be and, importantly, how it intends to get there whilst also understanding the variety of H&amp;S risks that the organisation has to contend with. The new Governance Structure was not fully embedded at the point of this review and therefore it was not possible to assess how effective it will be in practice.</p> <p>We also found very little Member involvement in H&amp;S, with H&amp;S reports not yet being shared with Members at the Human Resources Committee or Audit Committee (which was referenced in one of the H&amp;S documents). At close-out the Strategic Manager - Health and Safety also advised that engagement from staff across the boards is also inconsistent. Our survey also indicated low scores for Communication and Management Commitment &amp; Style indicating a need to have a clear strategy (as referenced above) with a Tone at the Top cascaded through the organisation. Whilst the directorate boards can support in this, without proper engagement and management buy-in their effectiveness will be undermined. There is the opportunity with development of a H&amp;S strategy to ensure there is clearly defined H&amp;S Leadership within and across the organisation (from both Members and Senior Managers) that will also support the achievement of objectives within the Boards.</p> <p>The strategy should help define where the Council is, what the Council’s objectives are and should reflect the resource requirements needed to deliver those objectives including whether resource is provided through in-house provision and specialists, or outsourced.</p>	<p>Due to a number of vacancies in the team and a need to restructure the service following LGR and this is the immediate priority in order to start mitigating against health and safety risk.</p> <p>Whilst there is a need to develop a strategy, focus can only be put on this once a team is in place and managing the current tasks. The initial thoughts on strategy would be to develop a strategy that is in line with the HSE’s Plan, Do, Check, Act approach. – <b>Timescale - October 2024</b></p> <p>Until H&amp;S Strategy is in place, work with the Executive Director – Strategy, Workforce and Localities and wider CLT on ensuring there is a clear tone at the top on Health and Safety within the organisation including support for ensuring the objectives of the Health and Wellbeing Boards are overseen and delivered. Agree Standard Operating Principles and Terms of Reference through ELT for how Health and Safety is overseen and managed across Directorates within the organisation including escalation principles. – <b>Timescale April 2024</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>Priority</b></td> <td style="background-color: #FFD700;">2</td> <td><b>SWAP Reference</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Responsible Officer</b></td> <td colspan="3">Strategic Manager - Health and Safety</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Timescale</b></td> <td colspan="3">October 2024</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Priority</b>	2	<b>SWAP Reference</b>		<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Strategic Manager - Health and Safety			<b>Timescale</b>	October 2024		
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<b>Timescale</b>	October 2024												
<p><b>Finding 1.2 – No corporate performance reporting on H&amp;S Performance</b></p> <p>There is currently no corporate performance reporting on health and safety, meaning that Health and Safety performance is not being actively shared with senior managers or Members. Although the Human Resources committee now has Member oversight for H&amp;S, at the point of testing there was no H&amp;S performance being shared with this group.</p> <p>There are also no targets in place to assess performance against, and as part of developing a Health and Safety strategy these should be considered.</p> <p>One of the negatively scored survey responses was regarding H&amp;S performance information being shared with staff. Ensuring that H&amp;S performance is captured as part of corporate performance information (and being shared as part of this through the organisation) would help in this area.</p>	<p><b>Action</b></p> <p>There is some initial information being shared with the HSWBs on Health and Safety, so information is now being shared within the new governance structures. SWAP will support in engaging within their partnership on what Corporate H&amp;S KPIs are measured and used in other Councils.</p> <p>The H&amp;S Manager will engage with the Performance Lead at Somerset Council to understand priorities and where H&amp;S can fit. Timescale has been set for March to review potential KPIs, and understanding of corporate performance process but acknowledge KPIs may roll out later to allow time for data collection.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><b>Priority</b></td> <td style="background-color: #FFD700;">2</td> <td><b>SWAP Reference</b></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Responsible Officer</b></td> <td colspan="3">Strategic Manager - Health and Safety</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Timescale</b></td> <td colspan="3">March 2024</td> </tr> </table>	<b>Priority</b>	2	<b>SWAP Reference</b>		<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Strategic Manager - Health and Safety			<b>Timescale</b>	March 2024		
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Finding 1.3 – No monitoring and reporting on H&S Training completion	Action	
<p>The SC H&amp;S lead has identified a number of mandatory courses for H&amp;S which was pending approval when undertaking this audit. Whilst there is training available on the Learning Management System, completion rates are not monitored or reported upwards and there is no accountability where staff have not completed training. We were also informed that current Members have also not received H&amp;S training, although the H&amp;S team have been liaising with Democratic Services to resolve this.</p> <p>The survey also indicated a low score for staff receiving periodic H&amp;S training. Ensuring there are periodic courses that are monitored will reinforce staff responsibilities and organisational expectations on the management of H&amp;S.</p>	<p>The H&amp;S Service delivered four briefings to Elected Members during September/October. A recording was taken which was added to the learning requirements of elected members who were unable to attend the sessions. The training sessions address the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handling Intimidation</li> <li>• Mental Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Personal Safety and Security</li> <li>• Personal Callers to Councillors Private Homes</li> <li>• Attendance at Organised Meetings</li> <li>• General Car Safety and Parking</li> <li>• Demonstrations</li> <li>• Handling Intimidation</li> <li>• Mental Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Personal Safety and Security</li> <li>• Personal Callers to Councillors Private Homes</li> <li>• Attendance at Organised Meetings</li> <li>• General Car Safety and Parking</li> <li>• Demonstrations</li> </ul> <p>The roll out of health and safety training for staff is dependent on other services.</p> <p>We've proposed to Organisational Development that once the courses are approved, OD should generate notifications informing staff of their required learning, we would then regularly report training completion rates at the Boards.</p> <p>Monitoring of completion can only be completed once the training is approved and available. Therefore, a longer timescale has been added to this to allow time for staff to complete before monitoring can commence.</p>	
<b>Priority</b>	2	<b>SWAP Reference</b>
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Strategic Manager - Health and Safety	
<b>Timescale</b>	October 2024	

## Finding 1.4 – Some H&S information is out of date or not available

The forming together of a single Authority has created significant challenges, with each organisation having differing approaches to H&S, different levels of maturity and numerous different policies. Our review highlighted that some of these were not fully up to date e.g. one policy referring to reporting H&S performance to the audit committee. Whilst we thought the H&S were easily accessible on the Somerset Council intranet, the survey results highlight a need to increase awareness of policies and procedures. The question, ‘I can easily access the H&S policies and relevant procedures for my work,’ scored 0.98 and 39% of lone workers did not know if their role had been risk assessed.

From attendance in two office sites, we also found examples of documentation that was not up to date. In Deane House there was a H&S notice board which had information focussed on Somerset West and Taunton Council including contacts in the H&S Committee and out of date insurance. In County Hall we identified a floor plan which had a date of ‘SEP88’ which showed the locations of fire safety equipment, the floor plan did not reflect the current open office layout.

## Action

Staff will be undertaking investigations in main offices on a periodic basis and will report back. However, it is noted that by undertaking these reviews that additional actions may be identified that need to be updated.

We have developed a policy review forward plan. In doing so, we have informed the Steering Group, Subordinate Boards and HR Committee that the forward plan is 'live' and reflects our best endeavour intentions, but we have had to caveat that owing to our resources, changes in organisational priorities etc, policy reviews may be delayed. The policy review/consultation process takes 13 weeks from the point I receive a drafted policy from one of the team. The policies must be approved by HR Committee who meet four times a year. Therefore, given our current priorities and limited resourcing, reviewing all policies will take up to 24 months. Target date has been set in line for completion of full review.

<b>Priority</b>	2	<b>SWAP Reference</b>	
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Strategic Manager - Health and Safety		
<b>Timescale</b>	October 2025		

## Finding 1.5 – Experience of H&S is inconsistent across the organisation

The survey highlighted that the experience of H&S is inconsistent across the organisation, and there will be challenges to build a single culture and approach to H&S matters at the Council. This will not be unique to Health and Safety.

The survey results were also analysed at Directorate, Legacy Organisation, Office Location and Lone Worker status for each question to help understand where there are inconsistencies across the organisation and potential areas to prioritise. Two of the weaker areas were relating to ‘Management Commitment and Style’ and ‘Communication’ and addressing these two areas may also support in building a single shared culture within Somerset Council.

There may be an opportunity to utilise the new HSWBs to review survey results in their own areas to better understand the responses and propose actions to be taken.

## Action

The results of the survey can be shared with the Steering Group for wider discussion and action setting.

Ensure the structure and design principles for the H&S service are agreed as well as ensuring that health and safety is factored into individual service design across the organisation. The planned structure would ensure there is sufficient officer support for the directorates within the Council that would support in improving health and safety communication and engagement.

<b>Priority</b>	2	<b>SWAP Reference</b>	
<b>Responsible Officer</b>	Executive Director - Strategy, Workforce and Localities		
<b>Timescale</b>	April 2024		