

Somerset Council

Human Resources Committee

– 13 January 2025

Approval Process for Somerset Council Health and Safety Policies

Executive Member: Cllr Theo Butt Philip - Lead Member for Transformation and Human Resources.

Lead Workforce Officer: Dawn Bettridge – Workforce Service Director.

Author: Daniel Thomas – Health and Safety Strategic Manager.

<i>Please complete sign off boxes below prior to submission to Democratic Services</i>			
	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Legal	Jill Byron	03.01.2025
	Corporate Finance	Nicola Hix	03.01.2025
	Human Resources	Dawn Bettridge	03.01.2025
	Executive Member	Theo Butt Philip	03.01.2025
	Monitoring Officer	Alyn Jones	03.01.2025
	Summary:	<p>The following policies were reviewed in accordance with the Council's policy review programme.</p> <p>Risk Assessment Policy</p> <p>The review incorporated a responsibility for managers to complete mandatory risk assessment training. The e-learning is available via The Learning Centre.</p> <p>The policy review also captured the requirement for risk assessments to be recorded on the Council's Safety Portal. Previously there was no mandate for risk assessments to be recorded on B-Safe/Assure, the Health and Safety Service made this change to increase standardisation and corporate oversight of risk assessments completed across the organisation.</p> <p>The policy has been split so that the policy and guidance information are now contained on two separate documents. One being the policy only, and the other the guidance. As part of the review, guidance documentation was also updated.</p>	

Asbestos Policy

References to RAMIS were removed owing to the implementation of the CIVICA asset management system. A terms of reference was added to provide clarity on the difference between Corporate Property and Housing Property. Some frequencies of inspection have been changed to follow current operational and regulatory practice. A section was added to capture The Council's responsibilities relating to social housing.

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Responsibilities Policy

A terms of reference was added to clarify several roles within the policy. The frequency of reports to ELT from the H&S Champion was amended in wording from "Annual" to "regularly" to allow for flexibility in report delivery.

The frequency of reports from the H&S champion to the Audit Committee was changed from 6 monthly to annually. This change takes into consideration quarterly reporting to HR Committee and the ability for more frequent reporting to Audit Committee, where necessary.

The requirement for directorate-level F02 documents was removed, historically the documents have duplicated information from the corporate F02 thus increasing the likelihood of inconsistent inaccurate information.

Those with line-management responsibility had the following responsibilities added

- Identify H&S policies which apply to the Service and ensure adherence to those policies as required.
- Ensure risk assessments are undertaken as appropriate (see HS04 Risk Assessment Policy)
- Identify training requirements for employees and ensure provision is allocated for any training requirements
- Ensure the timely reporting and investigation of hazards, near misses, incidents and accidents, ensuring sufficient resource is allocated.

	<p>Following the policy review, there is an outstanding action to update the Corporate Responsibilities F02 document. The F02 document identifies directors and senior managers with specified statutory responsibilities for managing health and safety within Somerset Council. The Health and Safety Service will engage the Council's Health, Safety, Wellbeing Boards requesting the document is updated to reflect changes brought about by the organisational restructuring.</p> <p>Reporting and Investigating Health and Safety Incidents Policy</p> <p>This review involved the amalgamation of two policies namely the Reporting H&S Incidents policy and Investigating H&S Incidents policy. The policies were merged owing to their inherently similar content.</p> <p>References to B-Safe were removed and replaced with references to the Safety Portal. The supporting form used for investigating significant H&S incidents is being withdrawn as the arrangements within the Safety Portal negate the need for such a form. However, a new data capture form will be available for services who require paper copies to facilitate the initial reporting of incidents prior to the information being transposed onto the Safety Portal.</p> <p>The policy has been split so that the policy and guidance information are now contained on two separate documents. One being the policy only, and the other the guidance.</p> <p>Hazardous Substances Policy</p> <p>The review consisted of minimal changes to the policy. The exception being, following the introduction of a hazardous substance assessment application within the Council's Safety Portal, a requirement to complete assessments via the Safety Portal was introduced.</p> <p>The policy has been split so that the policy and guidance information are now contained on two separate documents. One being the policy only, and the other the guidance.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>That the Human Resources Committee approve the following policies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Assessment Policy • Asbestos Policy • Responsibilities Policy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting and Investigating Health and Safety Incidents Policy • Hazardous Substances Policy
Reasons for Recommendations:	<p>Section 2(3) of <i>The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974</i> places a statutory duty on Somerset Council to prepare a written health and safety policy. The policy must be revised as necessary and be brought to the attention of employees.</p> <p>Owing to the Local Government Reorganisation, a review is necessary to ensure the newly formed Somerset Council has outlined its commitment, aspirations, and arrangements regarding the management health and safety within the organisation.</p>
Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:	Local Government Reorganisation.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	<p>Financial – Broadly speaking there are no unforeseen financial implications associated with the health and safety policies. Each of the five local authorities had a statement of intent and policy arrangements which outline a commitment to manage its activities in a safe and legally compliant manner, so far as is reasonably practicable (SFAIRP). There is of course a cost associated with that endeavour, however it's a well-known and understood legal requirement.</p> <p>Specifically, The Statement of Intent states “<i>so far as is reasonably practicable, the Council will strive to attain the highest possible standard of health and safety (H&S) management in all its operations</i>”</p> <p>Therefore, in seeking to achieve the highest possible standards of health and safety, SFAIRP enables the Council to assess the degree of risk against the financial cost, time, effort and impact associated with managing the risk.</p> <p>HR - The requirements placed on employees will be in accordance with statutory duties placed on them under Section 7 of <i>The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974</i>. Policies are subject to trade union consultation, and review by the Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Steering Group, thus ensuring the impact of each policy review is scrutinised to ensure expectations placed on employees are reasonable.</p> <p>Legal – Health and Safety Policies are reviewed to ensure Somerset Council remains compliant with legislative requirements.</p>
Equalities Implications:	The Statement of Intent commits Somerset Council to ensuring the provision of a workplace where employees feel safe,

	<p>supported, and free to raise concerns and feel included regardless of race, religion, gender, political beliefs, or abilities.</p> <p>The Council’s duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have “due regard” to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions. Following consultation with Somerset Council’s Equalities in Employment Officer, where required, a full Equality Impact Assessment will be completed for Health and Safety policies prior to publishing.</p>
Risk Assessment:	N/A
Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):	N/A

Background

Local Government in Somerset was reorganised with the formation of a single unitary authority covering the work of the County Council and four District Councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West & Taunton, and South Somerset). Owing to the forming of Somerset Council, work has begun to review and consolidate health and safety policies from across the five local authorities.

In consultation with the LGR JNF Trade Union Group and People Workstream, in August 2022 it was agreed existing County Council H&S policies would supersede district policies. It was also agreed that reviews of SCC policies would include a comparison of district policies.

For each policy a fundamental set of principles are being applied – (i) that they are legally compliant, (ii) align with best practice and (iii) are as concise and user-friendly as possible. Where possible, detailed process and guidance is being moved into guides/supporting documents to assist with keeping the policies as concise as possible.

Policies under review are examined by health and safety professionals from across the former five organisations before a newly drafted policy is then issued to Trade Unions for consultation.

In addition to the trade union consultation, policies are submitted to the Council’s Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Steering Group (HSWSG). Membership of the HSWSG captures representatives from across the Council’s seven directorates. This includes a mixture of Trade Union appointed H&S Representatives, Service Directors, Strategic and Service Managers.

Once policies have been through the consultation process, policy approval is requested from Chair of the Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Steering Group (Alyn Jones) and Chair of the Council’s HR Committee (Theo Butt Philip).

Policy Approval Process

The Health and Safety Service has established a policy review [forward plan](#) which we have aligned with HR Committee meetings to ensure drafted policies are brought to the attention of HR Committee prior to being published. The process followed is outlined below.

