

Somerset Council

Human Resources Committee

– July 2024

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	David Clark	24/06/2024
	Corporate Finance	Nicola Hix	27/06/2024
	Human Resources	Dawn Bettridge	17/06/2024
	Executive Member	Theo Butt Philip	28/06/2024
	Monitoring Officer	David Clark	24/06/2024
	Summary:	Retention of Records Policy The Health and Safety Service in conjunction with Somerset Council's Corporate Records Manager reviewed retention periods associated with health and safety records. In doing so, we observed the fact there is an overarching corporate policy maintained by the Records Service which contains much of the information included within the Health and Safety Policy, also observing inconsistencies in retention periods across the two policies. Our two Services believe there should be one Corporate Policy capturing record retention requirements across the Council, as such, the review focused on updating the Corporate Policy, ensuring all health and safety requirements are included. This exercise has concluded, following HR Committee, the Health and Safety Service intend on withdrawing the legacy H&S Policy to avoid confusion and irregularities associated with having two similar policies. Going forward we intend on signposting to the corporate Retention of Records Policy.	

	<p>Working Alone Policy</p> <p>This existing policy and associated guidance documents were reviewed in accordance with the council's policy review programme.</p> <p>The policy now states that Risk assessments for lone working should be conducted on the HS F09 form for lone working risk assessment and removes references to previous platforms for assessment.</p> <p>The responsibilities have been adjusted to keep in line with responsibility levels in other policies. This is limited to the Directors and Delegated Senior Managers and Service Managers. Some responsibilities, previously at Director level, have been delegated to services managers.</p> <p>The policy and guidance now also reference the Peoplesafe devices in replacement of previous brands of lone working personal safety devices.</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>Radon Policy</p> <p>This existing policy and associated guidance documents were reviewed in accordance with the council's policy review programme. Facilities Management and Housing Compliance supported the review process.</p> <p>The action levels for radon monitoring, and remediation activities have been adjusted to reflect advice given by the Council's Radon Protection Advisor and in line with HSE and public health England, current guidance.</p> <p>One notable change is the recognition of differing action levels for Housing, Schools and Cooperate Properties.</p> <p>The responsibilities have been adjusted to keep in line with responsibility levels in other policies. This includes the recognition of the Councils Housing directorate, where monitoring is conducted (and funded) separately from other corporate properties and schools.</p>
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	<p>To avoid confusion with driving fleet vehicles for work policy, the policy title was updated from 'Driving for work' to 'Driving your personal vehicle for work'. This policy does not apply to drivers of fleet vehicles.</p> <p>There are several notable changes to the policy. N.B., references to employees is inclusive of volunteers and elected members.</p> <p>The existing policy enables employees to obtain written authority from the employee's Director to use hands-free mobile device. Consistent with ICT's Mobile Device Policy and Fleet Services Fleet Management Procedures, the Health and Safety Service has removed the Director-level approval, no individual driving on Council business will be permitted to use their phone while driving.</p> <p>Publishing the policy will coincide with the launch of a new Power App, corporately the app will replace the legacy F14 Word document used to complete the annual driver risk assessment. The Power App for the F14 process will facilitate greater corporate oversight, including increased ability to audit compliance with the process.</p> <p>In implementing this new process, we intend on making it mandatory for managers to confirm MOT and Insurance documentation has been visually inspected.</p> <p>The current policy allows employees to self-declare appropriate business insurance and a current MOT, provided they fall into a low-risk category. However, under the caveat, this is ONLY when proportionate in-year sampling is taking place.</p> <p>The Health and Safety Service believe proportionate sampling is not taking place across the Council. Additionally, we asked Payroll to run a report detailing how many employees who submitted travel claims (June-December 2023) had completed F14 Driver Risk Assessments on Payroll's records, the figure was a low 13% which clearly tells us the F14 is not being completed as intended, indicating the current process is not adequate.</p> <p>In considering the proposed change which will see document checks become mandatory, the Health and Safety Service consulted Insurance and Fleet Services, both of whom fully support the intended changes.</p> <p>In addition to the above, going forward, Fleet Services will oversee monitoring of driver licence information for fleet and grey-fleet drivers. In doing so, they have appointed the Driver</p>
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	<p>Licence Bureau (DLB), employees will be asked to share their details with the DLB once every three-years, consequently the DLB will routinely screen for prosecutions/endorsements during the three-year period. The Corporate H&S policy no longer incorporates driver licence checks, a process which will be exclusively managed by Fleet Services.</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>Supporting Wellbeing, Work Related Stress Policy</p> <p>This existing policy and associated guidance documents were reviewed in accordance with the Council's policy review programme. Human Resources supported the review of the policy.</p> <p>Members of the Council's Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Steering Group expressed concerns the current policy contained too much information, and the associated risk assessment was too involved, highlighting the importance of providing succinct information to staff, particularly those who may be experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety. Therefore, without jeopardising the overall messaging and effectiveness of responsibilities within the policy, the content was reduced.</p> <p>The stress risk assessment was simplified and is now supported by an additional document to facilitate open conversation with Line Managers.</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 HR Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the withdrawal of the Retention of Records Policy given that this will now be addressed through the corporate records retention policy for the reasons set out in summary section. 2. Approve the following policies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Alone Policy • Radon Policy • Hand Arm Vibration Policy • Display Screen Equipment (DSE) Policy • Driving your Personal Vehicle for Work Policy • Supporting Wellbeing, Work Related Stress Policy

<p>Reasons for Recommendations:</p>	<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>
<p>Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:</p>	<p>Local Government Reorganisation.</p>
<p>Financial, Legal and HR Implications:</p>	<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>The proposed changes to the ‘Hand Arm Vibration’ and ‘Driving your Personal Vehicle for Work’ Policies, introduces new Power Apps which corporately are designed to replace processes which are historically based around the completion of documents either written or produced in MS Word. Process mapping exercises were completed to identify whether efficiency savings had been achieved. In each case, a scenario of an employee completing a form which is subsequently reviewed by their manager was mapped, the process of recording vibration tool usage was deemed to be 42% more efficient than the traditional method, while completion of a driver risk assessment identified a 27% efficiency saving.</p> <p>HR – The new policies being drafted will apply to all employees regardless of whether they have transferred into Somerset Council or have remained employed by the continuing authority.</p>

	<p>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>
<p>Equalities Implications:</p>	<p>The Statement of Intent commits Somerset Council to ensuring the provision of a workplace where employees feel safe, 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> <p>In respect of the policies relevant to this report, an Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed by the Health and Safety Service, approved by the Health and Safety Strategic Manager and Somerset Council’s Equalities in Employment Officer.</p>
<p>Risk Assessment:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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.

