1.   Audit Summary – Managers Health and Safety Self-Assessment (Chasm) Process

Background and Context

1.1   Health and Safety priorities during 2020/21 have rightly been to support council officers in working differently but safely during the exceptional times brought by the coronavirus pandemic. Providing Covid secure buildings guidance and doing spot checks has been core to the work of the central safety team during this time as well as supporting managers across the council to ensure services were delivered safely and staff safety and wellbeing is considered.

1.2   Despite this, and in line with the Council's approach of continual improvement, the governance framework, structure, approach and strategy for Health and Safety has also been reviewed. Proposals were agreed by the Corporate Leadership Board in April 2021. The improvements tackle many of the issues identified during this audit review. It is anticipated that this review will further support improvements already being planned as part of the council's refreshed arrangements.

Scope and Objectives

1.3   The Corporate Health and Safety Management System (CHaSMs) is used by services across the Council. It is a self-assessment process for managers to review and report their compliance with health and safety requirements.

1.4   The audit reviewed a sample of completed returns to identify issues reported and confirmed actions taken by managers to address those issues. Discussion was also held with a number of staff at all levels to understand how health and safety risks are managed in their areas.

Audit Opinion

1.5   The Audit concluded 'limited assurance' regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the CHaSMs process.

Key Messages and Findings:

1.6   Use of the Chasm's tool at 6 monthly intervals was reasonably consistent across two directorates but less so in the third.

1.7   This tool is designed to be used as an aide memoire by managers in consideration of their health and safety responsibilities and matters affecting their services. However, managers considered the process was largely 'tick box' with little intervention or escalation if actions required are not completed demonstrating that mangers may not fully understand their responsibility to ensure safe working arrangements. The process is unlikely to surface health and safety risks that are not being effectively managed.

1.8   Key actions, such as completion of required risk assessments and ensuring teams understand the mitigations have not been consistently completed. Managers highlighted the need for greater support in completion of risk assessment in complex or specialist areas.

1.9   Managers have advised a lack of understanding of their role and that of the central safety team. New arrangements will see more clarity over the governance structures and responsibilities for health and safety once rolled out.

1.10 Mandatory training had not been consistently undertaken in this area due to unclear understanding of training requirements, unavailability of courses and an inability to track who has had training and when refresher training is due.

Management Response

1.11   Wider proposals for enhanced arrangements, when implemented, will strengthen health and safety governance arrangements, integrating them with the Councils main governance structures including oversight and accountability at Corporate Leadership Board and HR Committee. A revised Health and Safety Policy Statement, Organisation and arrangements has been drafted which sets out the principal responsibilities for H&S across the council providing additional clarity in this respect. A formal system of Plan – Do – Check – Act is being introduced to enhance planning, implementation, monitoring and performance review of health and safety maters

1.12   Specifically to address the matters raised in this report, improvement actions are as follows:

- Targeted briefings will be delivered to managers to ensure arrangements and accountabilities are understood as well as risk assessment and risk control.
- Quarterly updates and progress to Executive Director Meetings (EDM) will be provided by the Head of Health and Safety.
- Completion of a training needs analysis and identification of core, local and specialist training requirements. Use of the new learning hub to track, record and monitor completion of H&S training is also to be researched.
- A move to annual CHaSM's and action planning of improvements with quarterly reporting to monitor progress. EDM's will be responsible to ensure completion. The Head of Health and Safety will drive the new way of working via EDM attendance and quarterly reporting.
- Risk profiling for all directorates will be completed by the Corporate Safety Team and the results reported to EDMs and Corporate Safety committee.
- The Corporate Safety Team will complete targeted auditing to ensure risk assessment are completed effectively.