

Audit Summary – Health & Safety Governance Review

Background and Context

- 1.1 Bristol City Council has a legal duty to put in place suitable arrangements to manage health and safety. The Council has an obligation under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ('HSW Act') to undertake reasonable measures to protect the health, safety and welfare of its employees, visitors, and members of the public.
- 1.2 The Council has developed its Health & Safety Strategy (Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2026) and is introducing new activities to support delivery of that, such as briefings to managers on health and safety governance arrangements and specific staff training such as stress management standards. The Health & Safety Team is in the process of undertaking a risk-based review of all its health and safety specific policies and procedures; a review of its corporate health and safety monitoring system (CHaSMS); and developing a new accident investigation procedure.
- 1.3 This audit was undertaken in March 2023. It reviewed governance arrangements for managing health and safety at the Council and assessed progress with implementation of the Health & Safety Strategy.

Scope and Objectives

- 2.1 The scope of the assignment included the following areas:
 - Assessment of governance arrangements in place to review, approve and monitor the Council's health and safety risks
 - Assessment of progress with delivering commitments in the Council's Health & Safety Strategy
 - Consideration of managers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to health and safety, and the perceived barriers and levers to achieving that.

Audit Opinion

- 3.1 Overall, Internal audit obtained **limited assurance** that effective health and safety governance arrangements were in place.

Key Messages and Findings:

- 4.1 The Council's formal governance structure for the management of health and safety risks includes Directorate Health and Safety (H&S) Committees, overseen by a Corporate Health and Safety Consultative Committee. An annual report is produced each year, reported through CLB and discussed at the Corporate Safety Consultative Committee. The report details health and safety performance and developing activity to improve and manage health, safety, and wellbeing across the Council.
- 4.2 During 2022/23, only the Resources Directorate H&S Committee met formally each quarter and there were no meetings of the People Directorate H&S Committee. Management explained that local committees meet informally within the People, and Growth and Regeneration (G&R) directorates; however, there is no corporate oversight or record of these committees.
- 4.3 The Terms of Reference for the Corporate Health and Safety Consultative Committee have not been updated since 2014 and discussion with officers on the committee highlighted that the committee may not be operating as effectively as it should. The Health and Safety team is aware of the challenges in the governance structure and is reviewing arrangements. Management explained that since our review, work has been done to reinstate the G&R Directorate H&S Committee.

- 4.4 During 2022/23, Health and Safety updates were reported quarterly to EDMs in both the Resources and G&R directorates. There was no regular Health and Safety reporting delivered to the People EDM. Management confirms they are in discussions to set up regular reporting to the Children and Families EDM. At the time of our review, similar discussions have not yet been held regarding reporting within the Adults and Communities directorate.
- 4.5 The Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2026 approved in April 2021 sets out aims in the short, medium, and long term. We reviewed progress against the short-term aims in the strategy and found improvement opportunities in the way progress is measured and monitored. Aims in the strategy are not supported by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or a detailed action plan to set out how progress and achievement will be measured. The annual Health Safety and Wellbeing report for 2021/22 includes narrative reference to the strategy. There is no regular reporting of progress against the strategy through the year to allow issues to be identified and addressed in a timely manner.
- 4.6 A survey distributed to all staff in the Council at Manager level and above resulted in 110 responses. Analysis of results demonstrated respondents feel able to discuss health and safety concerns with their managers and feel comfortable seeking advice from the corporate Health and Safety Team who are approachable and helpful. Survey results highlighted a strong commitment to health, safety, and wellbeing amongst managers, they were clear about their roles and responsibilities and many highlighted improvements in the Council's incident reporting processes. However, many colleagues did not feel that people who follow health, safety, and wellbeing processes appropriately are recognised, or that people who do not follow health, safety, and wellbeing processes appropriately are called out. A significant number felt that they did not have sufficient support to fulfil their responsibilities relating to health, safety, and wellbeing.
- 4.7 We raised two high, one medium and two low priority findings. These related to:
- Governance structure and the role of the Health & Safety Committees
 - Health & Safety reporting
 - Progress with implementing the Health & Safety Strategy
 - Lack of mechanisms to confirm risk assessment updates or approvals are undertaken
 - Managers identifying they need additional support to fulfil their health & safety responsibilities.

Management Response

- 5.1 The existing H&S governance structure is already under review and the findings of the report have been accepted by management who have agreed management actions to address them. These include:
- Revising the existing governance structure for health and safety to ensure that the governance works effectively and demonstrates strong and effective leadership, staff involvement and assessment and review. This will include a full review the terms of reference (ToR) of the Corporate Health and Safety Committee to include the purpose, objectives, measuring progress and membership, and a similar review of the ToR of Directorate Safety Committees across the four Directorates
 - The corporate H&S team will hold central records of the outcomes and decisions of those meetings, so there is strengthened corporate oversight on all areas of assurance and compliance
 - The EDM and CLB Reporting Cycles will be more clearly defined so that there is a clear oversight of directorate and corporate data, risks, and performance against KPIs in the corporate H&S strategy
 - As part of the governance review, performance reporting will be revised to ensure a consistent approach across all Directorates and visibility of progress and maturity gaps and concerns
 - Review the health & safety strategy to clarify the aims and create measurable outcomes and KPIs. Progress monitoring is proposed (subject the agreed new governance structure) to be quarterly via CLB, Corporate Safety Committee, Directorate Safety Committee, and EDMs
 - The existing suite of KPIs will be developed to link directly to the aims of the H&S strategy, to demonstrate how progress is measured, and reports will include more analysis and insight on themes and action taken as a result. H&S data will be included in the new corporate performance framework and will use existing data to help managers review progress and risks locally and at a corporate level

- Publicise the revised strategy to all staff and managers through a programme of communications, on-line briefings, and face-to-face development workshops, and work with the L&D team on a revised training strategy and development plan including core training for managers
- The newly re-launched CHASMs will monitor areas of compliance and recognise and share good practice via the governance structure but also via internal communication channels
- A survey will be sent to managers to identify which areas of health and safety risk intervention they need help with.