

## North York Moors National Park Authority Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee

1 September 2020

Health and Safety

### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To update Members on health and safety activity so far during 2020/21 and the way in which the health and safety issues arising from COVID 19 are being managed.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 This report is normally a quarterly update on accident statistics, progress against the agreed health and safety action plan and a commentary on other health and safety activity. While this paper will more closely follow the usual format than the June paper, it will consider the actions put in place to ensure that activities are undertaken safely while COVID 19 continues to be a significant issue.

### 3. Sickness Absence

- 3.1 Generally, sickness absence has been significantly lower than normal during this period as illustrated by the figures below;

1 April – 31 July 2019	135 days reported
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1 April – 31 July 2020	49 days reported
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- 3.2 32 of the 49 days reported absence have been as a result of one colleague having a longer term illness. Other National Park Authorities have reported large reductions in sickness absence as well. While it is hard to be certain, Officers believe that there are a variety of factors causing this. These include the fact that it may be easier to continue working at home if unwell, normal absence reporting regimes are different, many routine medical procedures have been postponed and the reality of working away from each other (plus schools and other workplaces being closed) may mean that the transmission of normal minor ailments has been much reduced generally. It will be interesting to see whether this trend continues during the autumn and winter months.

- 3.3 Two colleagues have reported being confirmed as having COVID 19 and have made a full recovery, thankfully displaying relatively minor symptoms. A larger number have self-isolated at different times because they have displayed some symptoms, but in nearly all cases, staff have continued to work while self-isolating.

### 4. Accidents and Near Misses

- 4.1 Very few accidents and near misses have been reported since 1 April which is partly a reflection of reduced activity, but Officers are aware of the need to continue to remind colleagues that incidents should be reported to ensure any necessary investigation and learning takes place.

- 4.2 One potentially dangerous incident did occur on 15 July. A staff member loaded a trailer at Sutton Bank and was towing it back to Helmsley, when a wheel came off the trailer causing the vehicle/trailer to jack knife on the A170. Luckily there was no other

traffic in the immediate vicinity and the driver was unhurt. The incident has been fully investigated by the Head of Recreation and Ranger Service, together with the staff member involved and their line manager. The results of the investigation will be considered by a Health and Safety sub group with external input from NYCC. A further update will be provided to members in due course.

- 4.3 The investigation has confirmed a number of facts. The trailer was being driven fully loaded along the A170 having exited Hambleton Plantation. The trailer was loaded with aggregate dust which was wet due to rain. The towing vehicle was the southern apprentice team Landrover and the trailer in use was a tipper trailer. The tipper trailer was fully serviced in February and had been checked over using the Good to Go system after the last time it was used as per established policy.
- 4.4 Shortly after joining the A170, the nearside rear wheel came off the trailer, and the vehicle/trailer then swerved across the road and turned 180 degrees, ending up on the verge. As the incident happened on a busy road, the priority was to safely recover the vehicle and trailer, so no photos were taken of the scene. The trailer has now been sent to be checked over at Ryedale Trailers to see if they can find a cause for the accident.
- 4.5 The trailer was out of use for a period of approximately 6 weeks during lockdown – early March to mid-April, but had been in regular use since then. A wheel on the opposite side of the trailer had had a flat tyre earlier the same day which was changed for the spare, but this wheel was not related to the incident.
- 4.6 There is no evidence to suggest that the vehicle/trailer was being driven at high speed or in any way improperly. The accident investigation has provisionally concluded that there are three *possible* contributing factors to this incident:
- The Land Rover has a higher trailer hitch than other vehicles causing the front of the trailer to sit slightly higher (this is not unsafe in itself, but should be taken into consideration when loading)
  - The wet aggregate on the trailer *may* have been heavier than expected and *may* have been distributed in a way that exceeded the nose weight of the trailer.

The two factors combined *may* have been enough to cause the trailer to spin around, additionally;

- A brake may have seized, affecting the wheel, although this is unlikely given the servicing regime and the regularity of use of the trailer.

These provisional conclusions will be considered and updated in the light of any additional information provided by Ryedale Trailers.

- 4.7 While there is no evidence to suggest that the wheel nuts were loose and therefore a cause of the incident, all of the Authority's towing vehicles and trailers will be fitted with wheel nut torque tags to ensure that any movement in wheel nuts can be easily observed and remedial action taken.

## 5. **General Health and Safety Response to COVID 19**

- 5.1 As Members are aware from the June report, the Authority has followed closely the changing Government guidance regarding workplaces. As this has developed since the last meeting a number of changes have been made;
- all furloughed staff are now back at work;
  - car parks, visitor centres and the gallery are now open;
  - the Education team are working with young people;
  - practical work is being undertaken by staff and apprentices;

- Voluntary Rangers are working again and there are a small number of group volunteering tasks being undertaken.

5.2 Prior to any return to work, activities are risk assessed and working practices changed to ensure that Government advice has been followed. The Authority is continuing to work with 2m as the default approach for social distancing with additional precautions, such as the use of facemasks, being necessary on the limited number of occasions where this is not possible (for example in lifting and moving heavy items).

5.3 The volunteering protocol is now in its second iteration (due to be reviewed again on 1 September) and while group volunteering is taking place, it is much more limited than usual and the choice of location, tools required and so on is carefully managed. While a small number of volunteers believe that our approach is overly cautious, the vast majority understand and support what is being done.

## 6. Remote Working

6.1 All office based staff continue to work remotely from their office base where it is practical to do so. Notwithstanding the comments made in paragraph 8, the continuation of remote working for substantial parts of the working week is likely to be in place well into 2021.

6.2 In the medium to longer term, this raises a set of questions about the size of office bases and how to incorporate remote working into standard work patterns. Officers consider it very unlikely that there will be a return to pre-COVID 19 work patterns. Many of the issues raised by this are cultural and technical, but there are currently some health and safety matters which continue to need attention including;

- A more systematic approach to ensure that remote work stations are satisfactory and are not likely to cause musco-skeletal health problems;
- Continuing to use a variety of methods to ensure that staff have opportunities to interact with their team, managers and others in the Authority to reduce any problems of isolation.

## 7. Provision of Additional PPE

7.1 Since June, the purchase of additional supplies of gloves, hand sanitiser and masks has been much easier. The supply of these to staff and volunteers continues to be driven by risk assessment and periodic reminders are given that handwashing with soap and water is considered to be a more effective protection against COVID 19 rather than relying on hand sanitiser.

7.2 The reception desks at the Visitor Centres have been equipped with clear perspex screens to protect staff against transmission of the virus. The installation of these screens has helped to give staff the confidence to be able to welcome the public back into our buildings. Similar screens will shortly be installed at the HQ offices.

## 8. Opening of Offices, Depots and Visitor Centres

8.1 Offices and depots continue to be open on a limited basis to enable staff to collect work and materials as well as deal with incoming post and answer machine messages. Straightforward protocols are in place to ensure that the numbers in a building at any one time are low, that social distancing protocols are observed and that regularly touched surfaces are clean.

8.2 While Officers are mindful that Government advice continues to be that those who can work from home should continue to do so, there are other factors to consider and for this reason most office based staff are returning to work for up to 2 days per week from

1 September. This will coincide with a return to normal working hours for all staff and the reintroduction of normal time recording systems. Officers want to ensure that there are opportunities for those in different teams to interact with each other and minimise the potential for 'silo' working. There is a general recognition that the Authority functions much better as one team with a shared purpose rather than in its constituent parts and it is important for all new staff to get a wider perspective of the Authority's work to enable them to be as effective as possible.

- 8.3 Both Visitor Centres are open to the public and staff have had to manage the situation with regard to the requirement for the public to wear masks in indoor areas. Staff have not enforced mask wearing, but have offered masks to those who enter the retail areas without one. The vast majority of visitors have been very happy to comply with the rules.
- 8.4 Sutton Bank in particular has seen a significant increase in the number of people visiting the site and this has also coincided with a small number of visitors forcefully expressing their irritation about the current circumstances to staff. Measures have been put in place to attempt to reduce the effect of this and the situation will be closely monitored by Officers. It is expected, however, that the end of the furlough scheme, coupled with a return to work in September should see visitor numbers at Sutton Bank return to more normal levels.

## 9. **Management of Health and Safety**

- 9.1 The Health and Safety group has continued to meet more regularly than normal (next meeting mid-September), supported by advice from North Yorkshire County Council. This means that any issues are dealt with quickly and provides an opportunity for UNISON health and safety representatives to formally raise any concerns that they may have. The Authority's managers have taken the view that, even more than usual, a collaborative approach with staff is both desirable and necessary to ensure that as many of the Authority's activities as possible are delivered, albeit slightly differently.
- 9.2 Contractors have continued to work on behalf of the Authority on a wide variety of work. In each case the Officer responsible for the work has satisfied themselves in advance that the contractor is working in a manner consistent with Government guidance.

## 10. **Other Health and Safety Issues**

- 10.1 As mentioned in the June report, the Trackplot device <https://trackplot.com/> is now in use by the Ranger team. The Lone Working Policy has been updated to reflect this and, together with the Health and Safety Policy approved by Members at NPA in July, has been issued to staff. The documents have been issued electronically this year, but the 'read' facility has been used to ensure that staff have received and read the email.
- 10.2 The Head of Volunteering is communicating with volunteers regularly to remind them of their health and safety responsibilities. This is being done via Involved Extra and My Volunteering.

## 11. **2020/21 Action Plan**

- 11.1 The draft action plan was approved by Members in July. While COVID 19 related actions will continue to be a priority, work will be progressed on the other parts of the action plan as detail below in *italics*;
- Manage the Authority's activities in a way that is pragmatic but properly reflects the national guidance in relation to COVID 19. This includes the delivery of services to the public as well as putting in place safe working practices for staff and volunteers – *this work is ongoing and has become part of everyday working life. The key areas*

*of activity are included in this report and are underpinned by regularly updated risk assessments, changed working practices and so on;*

- Assess Corporate Health and Safety Performance using the LGA matrix and take actions as appropriate (next assessment Oct 2020) – *this will take place when the new CEO has completed his initial induction programme and developed his understanding of health and safety matters.*
- Assess the effectiveness of volunteer TDL training by; a) organising regular meetings of TDLs with health & safety as an agenda item; b) regular spot checking of activities which are led by TDLs; c) develop (by 31 December) and implement a timetable for the above 2 activities – *the timing of this activity will depend on the reintroduction of a more normal volunteering regime..*
- Develop and implement a programme of communication on health and safety matters for volunteers, using a variety of different communication methods (plan to be developed by 30 September, implementation then ongoing) – *this is considered to be important despite the more limited activity and is part of the Head of Volunteering's work programme.*
- Develop a written policy and schedule for the maintenance and repair of machinery – *the incident referred to elsewhere in this report has highlighted what can go wrong with equipment and this action is a high priority.*

## 12. Financial and Staffing Implications

- 12.1 Day to day health and safety management has become significantly more onerous as a result of COVID 19. Additional health and safety expenditure is being incurred on PPE, hand sanitiser, screens in public areas, cleaning and transport. A central budget code has been created for this expenditure to enable Officers to properly track the additional costs of operating at the current time.

## 13. Recommendation

13.1 That Members;

- Support and comment on the work undertaken since the last FRASC meeting.

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### Background documents to this report

### File ref.

NPA Reports, December 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020  
FRASC Reports 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020