

North York Moors National Park Authority

22 March 2021

Item 6, Health and safety

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 To seek Members' approval for the 2021/22 health and safety work programme.

2. Background

2.1 As Members will be aware, the Authority has a systematic approach to the formal reporting of Health and Safety matters to Members. This reflects the high priority that both Members and Officers place on health and safety. Detailed quarterly reports to FRASC are provided and give a good opportunity for Member scrutiny of activity in this key area.

2.2 At the February meeting of FRASC, Members were presented with a draft health and safety action plan for the year which is normally signed off by the full Authority at its March meeting each year. The action plan provides the focus for the work undertaken by the internal Health and Safety Group and the draft for 2021/22 is detailed in part 7 of this report.

2.3 The health and safety activity in 2020/21 has, by necessity, dealt almost exclusively with managing covid-19. The subsequent sections of this report will outline a number of the key health and safety issues managed over the last 12 months. The FRASC reports for 2020/21 provide the detail that lies behind the summaries in this paper.

3. Sickness absence

3.1 One of unanticipated side effects of home working has been a significant reduction in sickness absence as illustrated by the figures below;

- 1 April 2019 – 28 Feb 2020 = 435 days reported
- 1 April 2020 – 28 Feb 2021 = 151 days reported

3.2 Just under half of the 151 days reported absence have been as a result of one colleague having a longer term illness. This matter is now resolved and the individual concerned has left the Authority.

3.3 The Authority's long term target for sickness absence has been 4 days per annum per full time equivalent. The absence rate to the end of February is 1.15 days per person and there will be no change to this trend by the end of March. It is becoming increasingly clear that being unwell no longer means a binary choice between being at work or not being at work. Many staff are finding that it is relatively easy to continue working at home while suffering from minor ailments.

There is clearly a proper balance for a responsible employer to strike here to ensure that staff don't feel under pressure to continue working when unwell.

3.4 The national pandemic has so far lasted for 12 months. It is only in the latter half of this period that a number of Authority staff have contracted the virus. All have recovered and none of the transmissions have taken place within the workplace. Older staff and those with longer term health issues are now able to be vaccinated and the Authority, as an employer, has encouraged everybody to take up the offer.

4. Management of changed working practices

4.1 Throughout the last 12 months, the Authority has followed all of the various iterations of Government advice for work places. This has brought about significant change for all staff, notably those based in offices. The health and safety repercussions of the pandemic have largely been two fold;

- The cumulative effects of isolation from colleagues and dealing with family matters, such as home schooling, have not been easy for some colleagues to deal with. Managers are talking to their staff regularly, offering support and informal networks amongst staff are also proving to be invaluable. The Authority's Mental Health First Aiders have been encouraged to develop a number of new initiatives. External professional support is also available for staff via Health Assured and the Department for Work and Pensions' Able Futures initiative.
- Putting in place effective measures to ensure that work can continue safely, particularly in the outdoors, has been important. Rangers have continued their work and the 2 apprentice teams have been able to operate in work bubbles to enable their training to continue. The revised risk assessments, travel precautions and so on have been effective, although they have slowed down delivery to some extent. The office environment has been closed for much of the last 12 months, but protocols are in place to ensure the safety of those who need to go into the office for their work. Advice has been given to staff on how to make their home office environment as comfortable as possible and reduce the possibility of musco-skeletal issues.

5. Accidents and near misses 2020/21

5.1 While numbers of accidents and near misses have been low during the last year, there have been 3 notable incidents which have been thoroughly investigated using a newly adopted accident investigation process. The learning points from the three incidents (tow bar failure, wheel coming off a trailer and an injury caused by flying debris) have been incorporated into day to day working. The FRASC reports from November and February provide detailed summaries of the three incidents.

6. Health and Safety policy 2021/22

6.1 The current Health and Safety policy was approved by Members in July 2020. Other than updates due to staff leaving and joining, Officers do not wish to make any further changes at this stage. It is anticipated that the policy will be reviewed again at the end of this calendar year.

7. 2020/21 Action plan and draft plan for 2021/22

7.1 The annual health and safety action plan was approved by Members in July 2020 and while Covid-19 related actions have dominated health and safety work this year, good progress has been made in other areas as well. Officers are keen that the actions originally planned for 2020/21 but not achieved due to the pandemic are carried over into 2021/22.

7.2 Therefore Officers' initial thoughts are that the action plan for the coming year should include;

- Assess Corporate Health and Safety Performance using the LGA matrix and take actions as appropriate by 31 May.
- Assess the effectiveness of volunteer Task Day Leader (TDL) training by; organising regular meetings of TDLs with health & safety as an agenda item; regular spot checking of activities which are led by TDLs; develop by 31 May and implement a timetable for the above 2 activities.
- Develop a formal register of relevant health and safety legislation and stating briefly how the Authority is complying with it by 31 December.
- Consider how to properly manage sickness absence in the context of a long term change in working pattern. Revised policy to be in place by 31 December.
- Reinvigorate the process of spot checking with formal targets for Directors to cascade through their Departments and regular updates on progress at monthly SLT meetings. System back in place by 30 April.
- Mental Health First Aiders to continue work throughout the year on a series of initiatives designed to support mental health. Work programme for this to be put in place by 1 April.
- The incoming Head of Recreation and Rangers Services to review and, if necessary, update the written practices for maintaining machinery reported to members in November 2020. Report to be made to November 2021 FRASC.

7.3 Members' views on these or any other items they feel should be included are very welcome.

8. Financial and staffing implications

8.1 There are no significant additional financial or staff issues related to the contents of this report. Budgetary provision is sufficient to pay for all appropriate health and safety training and personal protective equipment.

9. Legal and sustainability implications

9.1 There are no legal and sustainability implications to the contents of this report.

10. Recommendation

10.1 That Members

- Comment on and approve the proposed Health and Safety Action Plan for 2021/22; and
- Note the wider contents of this report.

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Background documents to this report

1. FRASC Reports 2020/21 and 2020 Accident Investigation reports available on request.