

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2009

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR RESOURCES AND
INTERNAL SUPPORT

9. HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDIT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

Purpose/Summary of Report

- At Local Joint Panel on 18 March 2009, Members considered the content of a health and safety audit commissioned by the Council, and an action plan prepared by Officers. An update after six months was requested.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION :	
(A)	that the action plan be received, and
(B)	Local Joint Panel receives an update on compliance every six months.

1.0 Background

1.1 Compliance with health and safety legislation and common law expectations has been applied inconsistently across the Authority. The Council recognised this, and therefore commissioned Zurich Risk Services to undertake an audit of the Council's health and safety practices in September 2008.

1.2 An update was requested after six months by the panel.

1.3 A report on compliance was also requested, at intervals of six months.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 Since Local Joint Panel in March 2009, a substantial volume of work has been undertaken to improve policies, procedures and compliance. The two most significant pieces of work were to revise and simplify the Health and Safety Policy and risk assessment procedures.
- 2.2 The Health and Safety Policy has been completely overhauled, and is now reduced to essential content. The new policy is also simpler to navigate.
- 2.3 The policy has been circulated for consultation. Unison, Safety Committee Members and other officers have all been invited to comment. Although consultation will be completed in September, the launch will be delayed until the new year due to the Committee timetable.
- 2.4 The previous risk assessment procedure is in run-off. Generic risk assessments covering a comprehensive range of topics have been produced. All employees will continue to be consulted. This is an essential part of the process. However a comprehensive range of risks and control measures have been considered and documented. This will prompt and assist officers, whilst reducing administration.
- 2.5 The generic risk assessments have been trialled successfully. They will be launched across the Authority in September 2009.
- 2.6 At least 15 additional volunteer Workstation Assessors and Safety Liaison Officers have been recruited. (A 200% increase). However there remain shortages in Bishop's Stortford.
- 2.7 The number of work station assessments and risk assessments undertaken has increased substantially, but at least 50% have yet to be updated or undertaken.
- 2.8 The Council's action plan (Essential Reference Paper B, pages 9.6 - 9.18) includes a summary of recommendations and all other action taken to date.
- 2.9 The author of the audit report has been invited back to the Council on 15 October 2009 for further review.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper A (Page 9.4 - 9.5).

Background Papers

None

Contact Member: Councillor M Tindale, Executive Member
for Resources and Internal Support

Contact Officer: Simon Drinkwater, Director of Neighbourhood
Services

Report Author: Graham Mully, Risk Assurance Officer

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER A

AGENDA ITEM 9

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives:	Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i>
Consultation:	A substantial number of Officers have been involved in the project including Human Resources, Facilities Management, Risk Assurance, Director of Neighbourhood Services, volunteer safety support staff, and Safety Committee Members. The Health and Safety Officer has completed the vast majority of the work. The support of everybody concerned is greatly appreciated.
Legal:	Individual employees and Members may face prosecution under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and related legislation, in the event of a breach and their negligence being proven. The Authority may also be fined, or ultimately prosecuted under the Corporate Manslaughter Act.
Financial:	Failure to manage health and safety adequately may lead to increasing numbers of accidents and illness, and therefore sick leave and / or insurance claims. Insurance premiums will increase if more claims are pursued. The Council could also be fined for any significant breaches if investigated. To date there have been no additional costs associated with the project, and none are expected.
Human Resource:	<p>In addition to a potential reduction in sick leave, staff morale and the Council's reputation may suffer in the event of a preventable incident involving a colleague or member of the public. By having a robust health and safety policy and infrastructure, staff will know that the organisation cares about their welfare.</p> <p>Previously completing risk assessments and other paperwork has been very time-consuming for Heads of Service and numerous other Officers. Whilst re-writing the Health and Safety policy and redrafting the risk assessment process has resulted in a significant increase in workload for some Officers, the new processes are much simpler for colleagues, resulting in time saved and greater compliance. However there will be additional work for services whose assessments are</p>

	not up to date or have not been conducted previously.
Risk Management:	<p>Risk management issues are considered within the report, and the previous paragraphs. However the upside risks (positives) must also be considered. There is potential to reduce sick leave, reduce the (slim) risk of prosecution and maintain or improve staff morale.</p> <p>Future reviews of the policy, and reporting on compliance, will be far more straight forward. The percentage of indefensible health and safety related complaints and claims should also reduce.</p>