

# AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT DETERMINATION SUB- COMMITTEE

**MONDAY, 6 JUNE 2022 - 4.00 PM**



**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor M Purser and Councillor R Wicks

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Nick Harding (Head of Planning), Phil Hughes (Acting Assistant Director), David Vincent (Health, Safety & Emergency Planning Manager) and Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer)

## **ARSC1/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The public minutes of the meeting held 4 February 2022 were agreed and signed.

## **ARSC2/22 CORPORATE HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22**

Members considered the Corporate Health and Safety Annual Report 2021/22 presented by David Vincent.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French stated that this is a very good report, however it does not record an accident involving a refuse driver who broke an ankle falling down a pothole last year. David Vincent advised that this incident occurred in March 2021, it was reported to the Health and Safety Executive at that time and appeared in the report statistics for 2020/21. The current report runs from April 2021 hence why it is not recorded in this report.
- Councillor Wicks asked what ongoing training exists to ensure safe lifting and manual handling. David Vincent responded that all activities should be recorded on individual team risk assessments where postholders are required to carry out lifting and/or manual handling. Training is available through courses and DVDs. Managers are responsible for reviewing risk assessments annually, and all training is refreshed every three years.
- Councillor Wicks asked what is done to identify potential slip/trip hazards. David Vincent responded that most slip and trips occur within the Refuse and Cleansing Team due to the nature of their work and being out and about in public spaces. Operatives are provided with suitable footwear and advised how to egress refuse vehicles safely and to be aware of environmental conditions such as ice, wet grass, frost etc. Furthermore, issues can be picked up in staff Health & Safety Committee meetings and there are specific Codes of Practice regarding Slips and Trips.
- Councillor Wicks asked what access staff have to the accident reporting book. David Vincent advised that there is a staff intranet page for reporting accidents and hard copy forms available for staff who do not have access to the electronic version. Refuse vehicle drivers also keep a supply of the forms in their cabs.
- Councillor Wicks asked if there are any defibrillators at Fenland Hall or the Base. David Vincent advised that there is one defibrillator outside the Civic Entrance at Fenland Hall but a discussion regarding further defibrillators is on the agenda for the next Health & Safety Panel meeting.

- Councillor Mrs Davis asked how many staff are still predominantly working from home and if they are being supported in health and safety matters. Sam Anthony responded that approximately 50% are still working from home regularly and yes, they are being supported in health and safety; they are also enabled to use Microsoft Teams and are provided with work mobile phones to keep in touch with managers and colleagues. David Vincent added that staff complete a working from home risk assessment which examines the homeworking set up and suitability of workspace and equipment such as chairs etc. All staff are supported by their managers and a bespoke approach is taken in each case. Where working from home is not suitable, arrangements are made to return staff back into the workplace.
- Councillor Mrs French said that in her view 50% seems a high number and asked when more staff will be returning to the office. Sam Anthony replied that this is dependent on a number of factors, one of which is the ongoing accommodation review.
- Councillor Mrs Davis queried the first and last items in Appendix 1 of the report and asked if she had misinterpreted the information. Both were marked green as completed but are referred to as ongoing. David Vincent responded that these items concern risk assessments therefore they are ongoing to ensure that the Council continues to comply with public health guidance; there is no end to these as they are always being updated.
- Councillor Purser asked if a line is drawn whereby an accident is deemed not worth reporting. David Vincent agreed that there is a degree of subjectivity in certain incidents where, for example, a paper cut would not be recorded, and accidents of this nature tend not to be reported. He added that there is, however, a 'near miss' reporting mechanism for staff to record incidents where there is a potential risk and something happens, but no injury occurs. Staff are encouraged to report these as they occur more regularly than accidents and can highlight potential issues.
- Councillor Purser asked what training is available for staff in managing challenging telephone calls. David Vincent replied that there is a specific e-learning course and videos case studies available for training purposes in how to manage and defuse challenging situations, as well as how not to take such incidents personally. Sam Anthony added that the Council has mental health champions in the workplace and all customer facing teams have several mental health first aiders working within them. In some instances where customers calling in are experiencing difficult times and are in crisis, they have been signposted to those individuals for support and to get them onto the services they need. Therefore, this is a service that exists externally as well as internally. Councillor Purser thanked Sam Anthony for the information.
- Councillor Wicks referred to the Council's risk register and said that in his view this is surely a live document which is never complete. David Vincent agreed and said that all teams are asked to submit a risk register so he can get a good overview of what they are all doing and need to do on an ongoing basis.

**Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Wicks and AGREED to note the Council's performance within the report for 2021/22.**

### **ARSC3/22 TREE RISK MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING AND TREE WORK**

Members considered the Tree Risk Management and Planning and Tree Work report presented by Phil Hughes.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French said that she welcomes this and asked if the Council has a tree policy. Phil Hughes replied that there is not currently one in place but attached to the report is a Code of Practice. Councillor Mrs French stated that the Council must have a proper policy as it manages thousands of trees in parks across the district but repeated that she particularly welcomes this as some of the new trees recently planted in March West End Park for the Queen's Canopy were vandalised. Furthermore, it will not cost the Council much money and

will save the potential for being sued or the possibility of the Chief Executive facing charges of corporate manslaughter, which could happen if a branch falls and kills someone. In her view, a policy should be in place as soon as possible.

- Councillor Wicks stated he also welcomes this as a starting point; he has had long and detailed conversations on the matter over many years. In his opinion with the number of trees in Fenland it is so important that they are subject to regular scrutiny, and he agrees with Councillor Mrs French that there should be a policy in place to reinforce this. Phil Hughes commented that it should be noted, as mentioned in the report, that it will mitigate the risk but will never completely remove it. Once all the trees have been inspected, it will reduce the risk to the Council and the community and make the system more robust.
- Councillor Mrs Davis said that she also welcomes the report, she supports it whole heartedly and added that a policy is needed.
- Councillor Wicks asked if there will be a mechanism whereby members can highlight their areas of concern to aid the ongoing survey. Phil Hughes replied that members can always report concerns to the email address: [parks&greenspaces@fenland.gov.uk](mailto:parks&greenspaces@fenland.gov.uk) which will be passed onto the officer undertaking the inspections. He added that the survey will be a formal assessment with a particular piece of software which will record each individual assessment so the background data will be there along with evidence that the work has been undertaken.
- Councillor Mrs Davis asked if the arborist working with the Planning Team would be on call as she knew of occasions when people have chopped down trees with preservation orders on them as it was too late to prevent it by the time the relevant contact at the Council had been found. Phil Hughes said he could not confirm that they would be on call but if the Council has a full-time officer and they are working on that day, they would be able to get to the location to assess the situation. Nick Harding added that there will be a greater opportunity for the Council to be able to react if someone is available rather than is currently the case.
- Councillor Mrs French stated her concern that the person employed to deal with the trees is not then side-tracked and inundated with Planning work, so they are unable to deal with the trees for which they will be employed. She therefore suggested a six-monthly report on how the tree work is going. Phil Hughes agreed that this would be provided.
- Councillor Mockett suggested the report detail the time spent on planning against the time spent surveying trees. Councillor Mrs French said that there would be an element of time spent in Planning to look at tree preservation orders etc. but she would not want to find they were spending most of their time working on planning matters. Councillor Mockett added that is why he suggested the breakdown in the report. Phil Hughes added that it will not be a question of the officer working two days a week for Planning and the rest of the time on tree safety management; there will be a flexible and sensible approach to managing the team and he will work closely with Planning colleagues on that.

**Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Mockett and AGREED to note the report and approve the proposed addition of a tree specialist to the Council's establishment.**

#### **ARSC4/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The confidential minutes of the meeting held 4 February 2022 were agreed and signed.

*(Members resolved to exclude the public from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)*

#### **ARSC5/22 PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM STAFFING PROPOSAL**

Members considered the Planning Development Management Team Staffing Proposal report presented by Nick Harding.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses.

**Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Mockett and AGREED to approve the recommendations within the report.**

*(Members resolved to exclude the public from the meeting for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)*

5.15 pm

Chairman