

# EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 28 JULY 2023 - 2.00 PM



**PRESENT:** Councillor G Christy (Chairman), Councillor Dr H Nawaz (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor A Gowler and Councillor S Imafidon

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), David Vincent (Health, Safety & Emergency Planning Manager) and Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer)

## EC6/23      PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 30 June 2023 were agreed and signed.

## EC7/23      HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the Health and Safety Annual Report 2022/23 presented by David Vincent.

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

- Councillor Mrs Davis referred to display screen working and asked what difference it makes if a staff member works from home or in the office. David Vincent responded that the DSE e-learning training covers both situations and a separate DSE risk assessment form will need to be completed, one for office work and one for home working, with any issues followed up once completed.
- Councillor Nawaz stated it is evident that the Council shows a strong commitment but on the dissemination of training on health and safety by internet, how is it supervised and subsequently assessed to ensure that staff understand in detail the implications not just what to do but of possible errors in interpreting these rules, and then if there are any contraventions or accidents. He stated that 88 days absent sounds a lot but maybe with 291 staff it is not a huge amount, but it raises the question how are they compensated for, are they paid leave or sick leave and is there an insurance policy? On the nature of accidents and specifically slips, trips and falls, which seem to be a constant, what does 'hard objects' mean? Would there not be an expectation to see improvements year on year and what measures are in place to further reduce these?
- David Vincent responded that regarding internet training, there is in place the Health and Safety induction with a form that staff must go through with their supervisor, covering what training they will need. The form also identifies with managers additional training specific to that role, i.e., working at heights for staff in the workshop. He stated that this is followed up by the line manager and if there are any concerns for additional training or control measures, such as supervision, this will be offered until the staff member is confident. David Vincent added that when he undertakes audits, the courses are looked at to see who has had the training and what are the reasons if staff have not had training, which is followed up and discussed also at Health and Safety Panel.
- Sam Anthony added that accident data is reviewed at the quarterly panel meetings where they also look at any lessons learned. Data is also captured on near misses, which are investigated to see if there are any additional training needs. Councillor Nawaz made the point that with all this in place there still does not seem to be a reduction in slips, trips and falls. David Vincent stated that in context there have been 8 accidents involving Refuse and Cleansing but

considering the miles that they walk and the things they must deal with this is a low average and if these accidents happen there is a management investigation looking at why and what caused the accident. Peter Catchpole added that not everything is within the Council's control as different hazards crop up, some roads have potholes or dropped kerbs and it is difficult to expect the numbers to go down as these conditions are not eliminated. However, health and safety is taken seriously with improvements always being investigated on safety and better protection. He added that some of the Council's operations are at the Port, which has a wet and dry side both providing danger areas, so effort is focused on these. However, safety equipment such as safety footwear is given to staff to accommodate the changing weather and better protective gloves are issued in areas where sharp and needles are involved. There is also a focus on near misses, encouraging more near misses to be reported to avoid the major accidents from happening. Peter Catchpole suggested that the data presented could be changed to show the hours worked in these areas to highlight how low the numbers are. Councillor Nawaz agreed the work put in place is to be commended.

- Sam Anthony commented regarding the 88 days lost and the cost incurred to the Council, most employees are entitled to occupational sick pay which is time limited up to six months by a robust sickness policy that is in place, within four weeks there is a home visit, with signposting to occupational health and their own GP for support.
- Councillor Nawaz asked if there was an overall cost figure that could be shared. Sam Anthony said there is not an overall cost figure available, but it can be provided. Peter Catchpole added that it would be a good idea to add this to future reports.
- Councillor Mrs Davis commented on the number of trained first aiders, with only one covering the business centres and as there are two business centres she felt there should be at least two first aiders. David Vincent responded that the business centres are run by the My Fenland Team and the staff are rotated around. Councillor Mrs Davis said that she would like to see a fully trained first aider rather than one trained in the basics in both centres to cover any emergency that may arise. Peter Catchpole made the point that at the business centres the offices are leased out to other businesses who have their own first aid plans in place, and this is something the Council does not offer within the lease agreement. David Vincent added there are new defibrillators fitted at every building with instructions for all to use and ICT staff have had working at height training for when working on servers placed on the walls in the building.
- Councillor Mrs Davis referred to Section 3.7 of the report, Conclusions from Accident Data, which stated that training and other interventions remain in place to address the areas of highest injury. She said nothing informs members in the report what changes have been made to cover these areas. David Vincent acknowledged this and stated this information can be added to the risk assessments for next year.
- Councillor Benney stated this is a very good report, many companies would be proud to have a report with results as good as this. He feels looking at the number of employees and range of services the Council provides the accident numbers are very small and the fact that they are not higher shows what is in place is working. However, there is no room for complacency, which he acknowledged is not evident, and the data shows how good the Health and Safety record is and the work done is commendable.
- Councillor Gowler said he agreed with Councillor Benney. Looking at the benchmarking against East Cambridgeshire and Cambridgeshire County Council, Fenland District Council is much on the same level as East Cambridgeshire, and asked if it would be possible to expand the comparison with private organisations such as factories. Peter Catchpole answered it is very difficult to benchmark Fenland District Council against another private company as there is nothing out there that compares to what is offered by the Council, but it is worth benchmarking against a wider field of councils.
- Councillor Gowler expressed concern that in 2022/23 only four near misses were reported and stressed he would like to see this area improved as it is important to learn from the near misses to prevent accidents happening in the future. David Vincent agreed and stated that at the start of this year eight near misses have been reported already so it is looking promising.
- Councillor Mrs Davis commended the work undertaken.
- Councillor Imafidon asked if there is a way of specifying which areas are being looked at. David

Vincent responded that this was possible.

- Councillor Christy agreed that it is a good idea to concentrate on the near misses and make changes accordingly.

**Proposed by Councillor Gowler, seconded by Councillor Mrs Davis and AGREED to note the Council's Health and Safety performance for 2022/23.**

### **EC8/23      HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY 2023**

Members considered the Health and Safety Policy 2023 presented by David Vincent.

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

- Councillor Gowler asked if the risk assessments are available on the intranet/internet. David Vincent responded that the Codes of Practice are on the intranet but not the completed document.
- Councillor Gowler stated that he has found in practice risk assessments get logged onto a matrix but are forgotten about until they are reviewed again so can it be ensured that this does not happen? David Vincent responded that the information is collated on a yearly basis, a risk assessment register is used, all information is added to the list which is then collated and reported to CMT on a yearly basis. He stated that during the audit the levels of risk are looked at in depth and assessed as high, medium or low, with the paperwork checked to ensure it has been read, understood, signed and discussed at a team meeting. Councillor Gowler stated he was happy with the process.
- Councillor Nawaz repeated that it is indicative of the Council's strong commitment to its workforce, but this does not mean that the Council should not aim to improve. The goal is to aim for the best, hence working together to improve, but should the worse happen is there a corporate insurance policy to address any major incidents and who is responsible for the potholes? Peter Catchpole responded that potholes are not the responsibility of this Council, but the Council does have public liability insurance in place to cover what it is responsible for such as playgrounds, and incidents to the public and employees should the worst happen. Councillor Nawaz added that he just wanted to understand the Council is not going to receive a big compensation bill that is not covered. Peter Catchpole responded there is a very good comprehensive insurance cover in place and the policy renewal is led by a lead officer and worked on constantly. He added that any changes are welcome, and the challenge is to be the best the Council can be by working together. David Vincent responded that in relation to potholes, an employee was off for 45 days due to a pothole related accident. Highways were contacted, and this was followed up by them. He made the point that in 2005 there were 93 reported accidents and in 2023 there has been a significant drop, with 18 reported this year which shows the work being put in place is succeeding year on year.
- Sam Anthony said she thought it appropriate to update the committee with regard to a previous meeting under the previous administration where the Drugs at Work Policy was discussed with an agreement to review it after six months following the introduction of digital fingerprint testing. This has proved to be more effective, delivering an immediate result which has meant staff can continue to be productive, returning to their post more quickly rather than not working whilst waiting for a result. So far 13 tests have been run in the past six-month period, and employees are tested on day one of a high-risk job. Sam Anthony suggested that perhaps a further review after another six months will be appropriate.
- Councillor Gowler responded that he is happy with the work being undertaken to keep both employees and the public safe.
- Councillor Christy added that he thought the report was very comprehensive and thanked Peter Catchpole, Sam Anthony and David Vincent for their contribution to this very important item.

**Proposed by Councillor Mrs Davis, seconded by Councillor Gowler and AGREED to approve the Health and Safety Policy 2023.**

## **EC9/23      PLANNING POLICY TEAM AND S106**

Members considered a staffing proposal relating to the Planning Policy Team and Section 106 to enable the continuation of the Local Plan and Section 106 monitoring responsibilities following the end of the Service Level Agreement with Peterborough City Council presented by Peter Catchpole.

Peter Catchpole explained that the worst-case scenario is the two posts will cost £140,000 per year with there being a reserve of £288,000 which will cover this for two years. He made the point that planning resource is very scarce at this time but there are costs that will be needed to complete the Local Plan, which is not expected to impact on the revenue budget but if the Council cannot recruit it cannot complete the Local Plan, which is a priority of members. A Section 106 officer is also important which was covered by Peterborough shared service but was only paying £20,000 per year, with there being £1 million in the bank of Section 106 monies and planning income is on course for £1 million this year, but this does not take into account increased costs and planning fees.

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

- Councillor Mrs Davis stated that she fully supports this plan and thanked officers for providing further information. She feels it is important to pursue the Local Plan and with Section 106 this will provide biodiversity net gain and encourage more work.
- Councillor Benney stated he is in full support of this plan and feels a full-time S106 monitoring officer is essential to provide a good service and get the job done with it being remiss if this is not supported.
- Councillor Mrs Davis added that Planning Committee is on show to the whole of Fenland through YouTube and the Council wants to showcase it means business.
- Peter Catchpole thanked the committee for the support and if agreed finding the resources would be tricky, but this is the first step.
- Councillor Gowler stated that he is in full support of this plan going forward. He is not on Planning Committee but he takes an interest and it is apparent that the resource is needed.
- Councillor Nawaz added despite initial observation where full costings were not available, he feels it is important that planning matters are dealt with expeditiously. Delays can be costly, but he questioned whether the three FTE's will then go on to assist other officers once the Local Plan is finished and lend services to neighbouring authorities, as whilst the report is commendable there is a risk of creating too much capacity.
- Peter Catchpole responded this is not the case as there are vacancies in other areas of planning filled with temporary and agency staff. There is a potential to help others if they have Local Plan issues so the Council is trying to be more commercial but is under resourced and would want to help itself before forwarding capacity.
- Councillor Nawaz added he was also intrigued by the shortage of staff and asked how this conclusion was arrived at. Peter Catchpole stated that roles have been advertised for a long time, there is a scarcity of planning staff nationally with many companies using agencies. He stated that the Council has used them because Planning vacancies cannot be filled with remote working being tried, and a planning resource paper has been submitted to CMT to look at giving the Council options.
- Councillor Benney made the point that it has been known for a long time there has been a shortage of planning officers, it takes time to train them and to become a senior planner. Often agencies will entice council planning officers as the commercial market can offer more money which drives wages up and there is no quick fix answer.
- Peter Catchpole agreed with Councillor Benney and added the Council is trying to keep the staff it has but is looking at other options such as apprenticeships to 'grow our own' to provide a top-class planning service.

**Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Mrs Davis and AGREED to:**

- **the creation of a Planning Manager and Planning Policy Officer (2 FTE) to continue the development of the Local Plan; and**
- **the creation of a S106 Monitoring Officer (1 FTE) to ensure contributions from developers through planning applications are received and spent in a timely manner.**

3.20 pm

Chairman