
HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To report the findings and recommendations of the Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Background

2. At the meeting of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 30th October 2006, it was agreed to establish a Task and Finish Review Group to
3. This report summarises the work undertaken, the findings from the processes adopted and the subsequent recommendations of the Group.

Membership of the Task and Finish Review Group

4. The following members of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee comprised the membership of the Task and Finish Review Group:
 - (a) Councillor C. L. B. Hughes
 - (b) Councillor E. A. Richmond
 - (c) Councillor A. J. Scott
 - (d) Mr. R. Bennett

Terms of Reference

5. The initial aim of the Task and Finish Review was to gain an overview of the current situation in relation to compliance with Health and Safety guidance and legislation in schools, to consider the penalties that may be imposed on the Council for any non-compliance, to add value to the work presently being conducted by the Health and Safety Unit, and advise on action that to encourage improved performance.
6. In order to achieve this, the Task and Finish Review Group determined the following terms of reference:
 - (a) To clarify the process of holding schools to account for the adherence to Health and Safety guidance and compliance with required legislation;
 - (b) To examine the evidence required to demonstrate that schools are adhering to Health and Safety guidance and complying with required legislation;

- (c) To consider the action that can be taken to encourage schools to adhere to Health and Safety guidance and comply with required legislation.

Methods of Investigation

7. The Task and Finish Review Group met on five occasions between Tuesday, 14th November 2006 and Monday, 24th September 2007, and held discussions during those meetings with Officers from the Health and Safety Unit; the Community Services Department; the Children's Services Department and the Corporate Governance Division. **Appendix 1** reflects the complete notes of these meetings.

Findings

8. At the initial meeting of the Task and Finish Review Group on Tuesday, 14th November 2006, members were informed of the position in relation to health and safety in schools. The Health and Safety Manager explained to members of the Task and Finish Review Group that the Health and Safety Unit worked in a purely advisory capacity, and that it was not the role of the Unit to any conduct enforcement action.
9. The Task and Finish Group initially expressed concerns in relation to a number of areas including the use of external contractors in remedying any health and safety issues, the proof of works done, the standard of any work conducted, staffing issues and the level of health and safety training undertaken by schools.
10. Also, at the initial meeting, the Health and Safety Manager notified members of the implementation of a School Health Check programme, which would be rolled out to all schools in the Borough to gauge the level of health and safety awareness and training undertaken, and to promote the benefits of engaging with the Council's Health and Safety Unit. It was also reported that the Health and Safety Unit would be employing a further full-time officer, who would be able to assist with engaging with schools.
11. During subsequent meetings, members of the Task and Finish Review Group continued to receive reports from the Health and Safety Manager in order to monitor the progress of the School Health Check programme. As part of the School Health Check programme a school tracker system was developed, which allowed the Health and Safety Unit to record when a school had last been visited, what happened on that visit, whether there were any immediate training requirements and note any future recommendations.
12. Over the course of the review period every school in the Borough was visited by staff from the Health and Safety Unit, who tailored their approach to the individual school and dealt with any specific issues as they arose. Once a School Health Check has been conducted this must be signed off by the Head Teacher of the school, and the Chair of Governors. As a result of the School Health Checks, the Health and Safety Unit are now in a position to offer bespoke training and awareness packages to each school. The Health and Safety Manager stated that the Health and Safety Unit would repeat their cycle of visits again with effect from September 2007.
13. It was reported that since in work on the School Health Check had been implemented the number of Accident Forms submitted by schools had risen, however this was only to be expected due to an increase in awareness of the correct procedure.

14. Members of the Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group also received information from the Assistant Director, Technical Services, in relation to the system of cyclical maintenance offered to schools by the Community Services Department. Members heard that schools are contacted annually and notified of the services provided by the Council, some statutory and some recommended. It was explained that the Community Services Department actively promote these services as they are competing for business, however schools may choose to buy in from elsewhere if they so wish. Members were concerned that cost may be a decisive factor, however were reassured that cost is not a disincentive and that the costs of services provided are competitive. Members were informed that the main difference in service provision is the method employed. The Assistant Director, Technical Services, stated that the benefit that the Council can provide is that the Council could bring all these services together, instead of a school approaching eleven different providers.
15. Members were informed that if a school does not respond to the offer of services from the Council, then the school is reported to the Capital Programme Manager and the Director of Children's Services, who will then make further enquiries.

Conclusions

16. Whilst members of the Task and Finish Review Group remain frustrated that the Council are unable to impose any restriction on where a school must take its health and safety maintenance and training provision from, the group were extremely pleased with the progress made by the Health and Safety Unit in relation to the School Health Check.

Recommendations

17. It is recommended:
 - (a) That an update report be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in six months time.
 - (b) That an annual Children's Services Award be created for schools involving Staff and Pupils demonstrating commitment to Health and Safety in schools.

Health and Safety in Schools Task and Finish Review Group