

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN SCHOOLS TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

MONDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER 2007.

Present: Councillor Hughes, Councillor Richmond and Mr. R. Bennett.

Apologies Received: Councillor A. J. Scott.

Officers Present:

- Stuart MacKenzie, Health and Safety Officer.

Stuart MacKenzie opened the meeting by providing members of the Task and Finish Review Group with an update on the School Health Check. Stuart confirmed that the Health and Safety Unit had now visited every school in the Borough, and that the Unit would be revisiting every school again during the new academic year. The Health and Safety Unit will be confirming that the Health and Safety checks have been signed off by the Chair of Governors, and that staff are fully aware of Health and Safety policies.

Discussion ensued on the work being conducted to effectively reduce the number of accidents, slips, trips and falls. Whilst acknowledging that such accidents would always happen as a matter of course in any playground, the Stuart suggested that schools may want to produce a map of play areas and plot where incidents occur, and then check for correlations.

Members of the Task and Finish Review Group then discussed violence and physical assaults on members of staff, and requested an insight into cases where staff had successfully sued the Council. Stuart stated that he was aware of cases where sums of £250,000, £195,000 and £150,000 had been paid out. It was reported that 70% of such incidents in Darlington were accounted for by one individual pupil at the Education Village, and that this pupil was now on the verge of exclusion. Stuart confirmed that in this instance a large amount of documentary evidence had been collated. Members agreed that protecting staff was paramount and Councillor Hughes enquired whether such a case should become a matter for the police. Stuart stated that the increase in such reports does not necessarily mean that there are increased incidents, but may be attributed to the increased awareness of the reporting process.

Councillor Hughes wished to clarify whom, as a Council, the Health and Safety Unit had responsibility for. Stuart stated that the Unit had a responsibility to develop awareness of staff, children and any members of the public on the property. Stuart advised members that the teaching unions advise that teachers should not break up any fights, and any such incidents should be recorded in an accident book. There is discretion applied as to whether such incidents are reported to the Health and Safety Unit, but the ruling is that such an incident is only reportable to the Health and Safety Unit if it is reportable to the Health and Safety Executive. There are some schools that have not made any such reports.

Stuart clarified the difference between supervised activity in a school (in the classroom) and unsupervised activity (in the playground).

Councillor Hughes enquired as to how the Council can get the pupils more involved. Stuart reported that there was a Health and Safety Committee meeting at Hummersknott School later that day and that it was hoped that a senior pupil would be co-opted onto the Committee.

Members entered into discussion on Health and Safety responsibilities in relation to the Eastbourne Church of England Academy, and as an independent school concern was expressed that the Health and Safety provision may be provided by an external source, or receive no Health and Safety advice. It was acknowledged that the Council would have no legal liability for the Eastbourne Church of England Academy, however we would have a responsibility and duty toward the children and staff. Stuart MacKenzie agreed to look into this issue as soon as possible.

In closing Stuart pointed out that a lot of credit must go to the schools and stated that the attitude and responsiveness of the majority had been excellent. Many schools now include Health and Safety as a standard item on the agendas of team meetings and some have separate meetings. Some schools have staff who are undertaking Health and Safety Courses and who are looking to further develop their qualifications.

Action: That the Final Report of the Task and Finish Review Group be prepared for submission to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Monday, 5th November 2007, with the recommendation that an update report be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in six months time.