

PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO (Health & Safety Consultative Group) DECISION RECORD

19 October 2011

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Present:

Councillor Hilary Thompson (Performance Portfolio Holder)

Trades Union Representatives
Edwin Jeffries, Derek Wardle

Officers: Joanne Machers, Chief Customer and Workforce Services
Officer
Stuart Langston, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager
Denise Wimpenny, Principal Democratic Services Officer

1. Substance Misuse Policy *(Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer)*

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To seek the Portfolio Holder's approval for revisions to the Alcohol, Drugs and Substance Abuse Policy.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report provided background information in relation to the current Drugs and Substance Abuse Policy and the need to review the policy to reflect how the Council currently operated. The Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager referred to the draft revised policy, attached as an appendix to the report together with the statistical information relating to illicit drug misuse and alcohol related issues.

Binge drinking in Hartlepool was statistically significantly higher than the England average (24.9% as opposed to 18.9%).

The Council, through its adoption of an Employee Wellbeing Strategy, recognised that its employees are its most important asset. To ensure that

the services the Council provided were good quality, it was essential that staff remained at work, were healthy and motivated. One of the major causes of ill health was associated with the misuse of substances. Whilst this was predominantly alcohol, it may also include prescription and other over the counter medicines. The revised policy had been renamed to clearly identify that it covered any substance misuse which could ultimately affect performance and behaviour.

The Council wished to be supportive to those members of staff who had a problem with substance abuse. However, this was only practical if the individual acknowledged a problem existed. Whilst the policy aimed to reflect the Council's position in being supportive, where someone failed to acknowledge an issue, this would be dealt with via the normal disciplinary/capability route.

With regard to consultation, the Trade Unions had been consulted on the proposed amendments to the policy and no objections had been raised.

The Portfolio Holder expressed her support in relation to the aim of the strategy and queried how the strategy was communicated to staff. The Health Safety and Wellbeing Manager outlined the various communication methods which included publication on the intranet, promotion through health advocates and trade unions as well as effective communication with managers to ensure effective early intervention and support. The Portfolio Holder was pleased to note that the policy recognised that others may be affected by their colleagues' substance abuse and that support was available.

A Trade Union Representative sought clarification as to whether the current monitoring of substance misuse was adequate given the increasing level of pressures and stress on employees as a result of the risks of compulsory redundancy affecting the workforce at present. It was suggested that an update report examining the issues raised be submitted to the next meeting of this Portfolio.

Decision

- (i) That the content of the report be noted.
- (ii) That the revised and renamed Substance Misuse Policy be approved.
- (iii) That an update report be submitted to the next meeting to address the monitoring of substance misuse issues as outlined above.

2. Employee Wellbeing Update (*Chief Customer and Workforce Services Officer*)

Type of decision

Non-key

Purpose of report

To inform the Portfolio Holder of past activity around workplace health and future proposals relating to employee wellbeing within the organisation.

Issue(s) for consideration by Portfolio Holder

The report provided background information to the Council's approach to Employee Wellbeing and Workplace Health following the adoption of the Employee Wellbeing Strategy in April 2011. The strategy aimed to give strategic direction to health, safety and wellbeing initiatives across the Authority, underpinning all policies and procedures relating to the protection of Council staff over the next 3 years. The strategy had an outward-facing element which allowed the Council, as a leader within the community, to support and share good practice with contractors, partners and external organisations to improve the health and wellbeing of the wider Hartlepool population. Funding was currently provided via NHS Hartlepool to employ a Workplace Health Improvement Specialist to lead on this work until March 2013. A Health Advocate Steering Group was also established in April 2010 to facilitate development and communication of initiatives and campaigns across the Authority.

A number of initiatives and campaigns had already taken place across the Council linked to the Annual Health Promotion Plan within the Employee Wellbeing Strategy, details of which were set out in the report.

With regard to future proposals, an Annual Health Promotion Plan detailing key campaigns and initiatives would be completed shortly and reported to a future Portfolio meeting. Details of future initiatives were provided, as detailed in the report and included further Healthy Heart Checks to all eligible staff. The service was free to the local authority and only required promotion, administration of appointments and booking of venues etc.

The risks of not addressing these issues could lead to increased sickness absence, lower staff morale, reduced productivity and increased staff turnover.

The Portfolio Holder emphasised the benefits of initiatives of this type, the comments of which were shared by Trade Union Representatives. Trade Union representatives expressed their support in promoting the proposals and were keen to establish further details on take-up of the initiatives to determine whether any areas were not accessing the service.

Trade Union representatives were pleased to note the introduction of the salary sacrifice scheme and commented on the importance of establishing links with debt awareness problems.

A Trade Union Representative expressed concerns that the current occupational health accommodation was not appropriate to which it was reported that arrangements were in place to address this issue.

Decision

That the content of the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 am.

P J DEVLIN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

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