Durham County Council
Health and Safety Policy

Version: 9.0
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Health and Safety

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1. Statement of Intent

Durham County Council's vision is to be an exemplary employer in all matters relating to the health, safety and wellbeing and prevent injury and ill-health to those at work and those affected by work activities by hazard elimination and risk reduction.

Durham County Council (DCC) acknowledges and accepts its statutory duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of all its employees and those who may be affected by its work activities, as defined by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, whether on DCC premises or carrying out DCC business elsewhere.

Elected Members, Directors, Heads of Service, managers, supervisors and all employees are encouraged to develop a culture, which promotes healthy and safe working environments; by working together we can create a safer and healthier environment for ourselves and others.

In particular, the authority will ensure, in so far as reasonably practicable:

- Hazards are eliminated wherever possible
- Plant, equipment, places of work and working environments that are safe and without risks to health;
- Safe systems of work are established, implemented and adequately supervised;
- The provision of such information, instruction and training as is necessary to ensure health and safety at work;
- Safety and the absence of risks to health in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances used at work;
- Adequate welfare facilities and arrangements.

Furthermore, to achieve our objectives we will:

- Prioritise our work focus on hazard elimination and work on the principal that work related accidents, injuries, dangerous occurrences and ill-health conditions can be prevented and risks shall be managed both effectively and proportionately;
- Recognise the vital importance of the continued commitment of all employees and elected members to the highest standards of health and safety, and ensure that they have the necessary skills and support to achieve this;
- Actively promote employee and elected member participation and co-operation in establishing and maintaining measures to improve health and safety at work;
- Ensure through systematic hazard identification and risk assessment programmes, that risks associated with the Councils activities are identified and then eliminated, reduced or adequately controlled and that all such assessments are reviewed as appropriate;
- Provide and promote adequate means for effective communication, co-operation and consultation with recognised trade unions and employee representatives;
- Provide sufficient finance and resources to successfully achieve our aims and objectives;
- Recognise that effective health and safety management will benefit the council, reducing financial and resource losses;
- Require that any organisations or individuals contracted to work with the council applies health and safety standards that are fully consistent with our own.

The Council recognises that for this policy to be effective, management of health and safety must be fully integrated into, and treated with at least equal status to, any other area of work. It is our intent to demonstrate an ongoing and determined commitment to the continuous improvement of health and safety at work throughout the Council.

The Director of Resources undertakes the lead role for Health and Safety on behalf of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and will ensure that Elected Members, Chief Executive and Directors are informed of the ramification of any significant health and safety issues and will keep the Council appraised of relevant changes to best practice and legislation.

In addition to the provision of competent technical advice to the Council and its officers, the Director of Resources will ensure that an annual report is produced on the overall safety performance of the Council for corporate governance and assurance purposes.

Andrew Husband
Leader of the Council

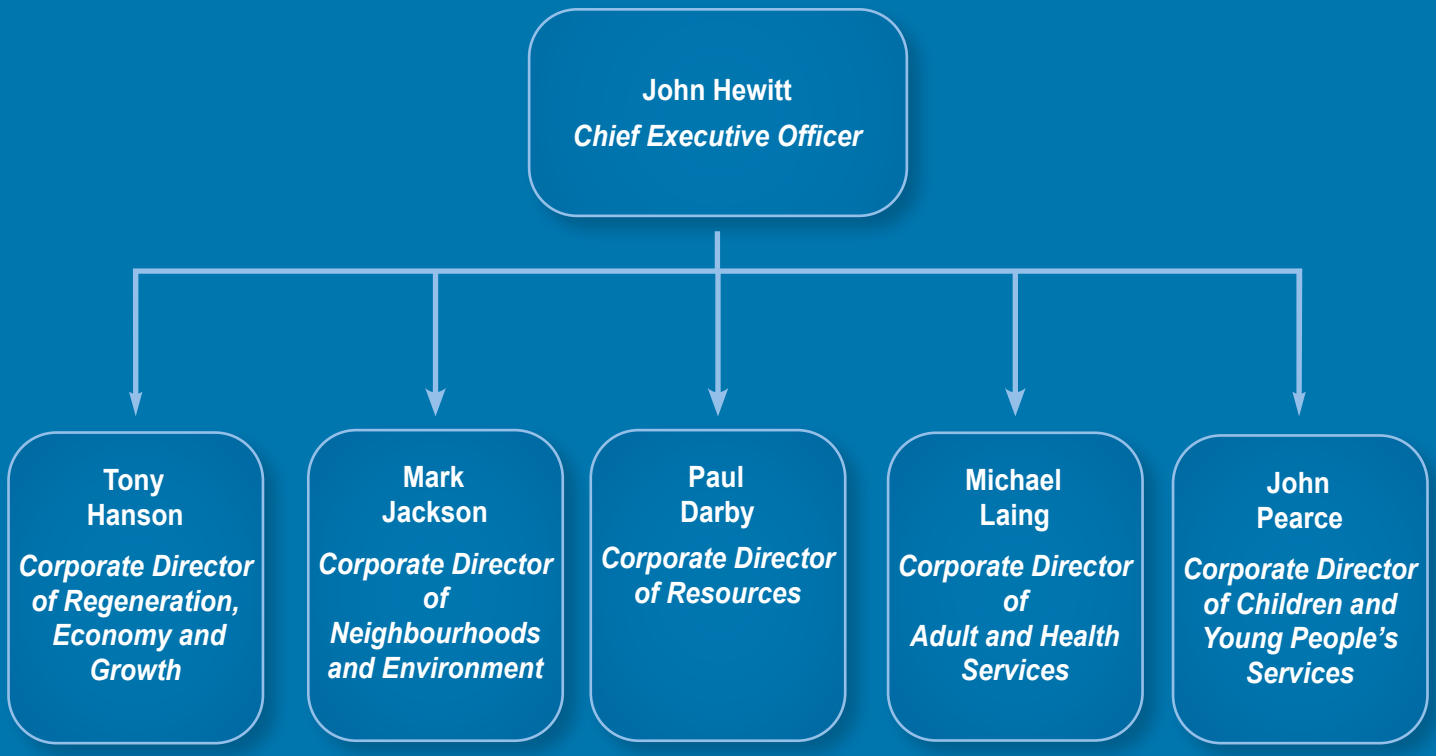
John Hewitt
Chief Executive

June 2025

2. Organisation

Durham County Council

Corporate Leadership Team Structure



2.
Organisation

This part of the policy explains how we develop and implement our organisation and arrangements for health and safety. It describes the way we manage the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring, review, and auditing of preventative and protective measures.

Organisation

The Elected Members of the Council

Elected Members have an individual and collective role in providing health and safety leadership to the Council.

In order to provide this leadership Elected Members will ensure that they address all of the health and safety implications of their decisions and ensure adequate resources are provided to eliminate or manage risks within their portfolios.

Elected members will adopt and promote policies which will encourage high standards of health and safety performance by individual employees and a positive culture of health and safety throughout the Council's operations.

The Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for health and safety within the Council and particularly for the Council Health and Safety Policy. He is responsible for implementing policy decisions, and ensuring provision of sufficient finance and resources, based upon developed risk assessment principles.

Specifically the Chief Executive will:

- Ensure that all health and safety action plans are developed and implemented with the objective of eliminating all unsafe acts;
- Take appropriate action regarding any significant health and safety failures, and the outcome of the investigations into their causes;
- Regularly monitor and review health and safety performance of Directors to ensure they have carried out their health and safety responsibilities;
- Ensuring the policy is reviewed, at least biennially, and revised as necessary so as to maintain its effectiveness;
- Monitor and review significant Health and Safety risks on the corporate risk register;
- Approve and support the Health, Safety and Wellbeing strategy.

The Corporate Director of Resources

The Chief Executive has nominated the Director of Resources as 'Health and Safety champion'. The Director of Resources has specific responsibilities for health and safety performance, organisation and arrangements.

The Corporate Director of Resources will:

- Report to Elected Members, the Chief Executive and CLT regarding significant health and safety incidents and relevant changes to best practice, legislation, and corporate policy;
- Ensure that health and safety risk management issues are properly addressed, both by CLT and the wider Council;
- Ensure that effective health and safety audit processes are established throughout the Council;
- Ensure that a detailed annual corporate health and safety report is produced and that recommendations are effectively implemented;
- Ensure that elected members are informed of all health and safety matters with resource implications and any significant failing and enforcement action taken by statutory agencies;
- Ensure delivery of a high quality health and safety team and occupational health service;
- Chair and proactively lead the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group;
- Support, oversee and review the health, safety and wellbeing strategy.

2. Organisation

Directors

Directors have overall responsibility for health and safety within their service. In order to discharge this responsibility they will demonstrate a genuine commitment to pursuing high standards of health and safety by integrating the principles of risk management into general business activity.

Specifically Directors will:

- Take an active and visible role in communicating and encouraging a positive attitude to health and safety;
- Have appropriate health and safety forums made up of management and employee representatives from each service area or division of the service;
- Produce and monitor detailed health and safety plans and performance standards to achieve Corporate, and Service objectives;
- Allocate adequate resources to improve and maintain health and safety standards;
- Ensure there is a systematic programme of risk assessment, ensuring that assessments are undertaken and regularly reviewed in all service areas as appropriate;
- Comply with the requirements of the Council Health and Safety Policy and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy;
- Ensure consultation takes place with employees and partnership organisations to ensure a joint approach to health and safety in the workplace and co-operation with recognised trade union health and safety representatives to enable them to fulfil their function;
- Ensure that all employees are competent to fulfil their designated duties, and provide training and supervision to support the development of their H&S competence;
- Inform the Occupational Health and Safety manager as soon as practicable of any enforcement actions or visits by HSE or any other regulatory bodies;
- Ensure this policy is brought to the attention of all employees;
- Ensure duty holders are identified and competent in accordance with Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations.

Head of Service

Each Head of Service is responsible for ensuring high health and safety standards within their service area and compliance with this policy.

Specifically they will:

- Play a lead role in ensuring the implementation of Health, safety and wellbeing strategy and policy, including health and safety action plans;
- Play an active and visible role in operating and promoting effective health and safety policies and procedures in line this policy;
- Monitor the service areas progress in achieving the annual plans and targets of the service;
- Ensure risk assessments are undertaken and documented by appropriate managers, employee representatives. Ensure risk assessments are communicated to employees and reviews are undertaken as appropriate;
- Ensure employees, supervisors and managers are competent and have sufficient resources allocated to discharge their health and safety duties;
- Ensure health and safety training needs analysis, based on risk assessments, for all employees and activities. Ensure all employees receive appropriate induction, job specific, and refresher training;
- Ensure all work related accidents, incidents, near misses and ill-health are reported and investigated in line with council procedures;

2. Organisation

- Incorporate key health and safety responsibilities into individual job descriptions and objectives, indicating individual levels of responsibility;
- Ensure work activities, service delivery, health and safety systems and procedures are periodically monitored via inspection and auditing regimes;
- Inform the Occupational Health and Safety manager as soon as practicable of any enforcement actions or visits by HSE or any other regulatory bodies.

Tier 4 Managers

All Tier 4 Managers have responsibility to ensure the implementation of this policy within their areas of responsibility.

Tier 4 Managers will:

- Play a lead role in ensuring the implementation of Health, safety and wellbeing strategy and policy including delivery of service specific H&S action plans;
- Actively encourage and promote implementation of the Council health and safety policy via safety tours and visits where appropriate
- Ensure health and safety risk assessments are undertaken and control measures are implemented so as to eliminate hazards and minimise risks;
- Allocate adequate resources for the management of health and safety risks and advising heads of service when additional resources are required;
- Assist the Head of Service in the identification of the training needs of employees and ensuring relevant training is provided and health surveillance is attended;
- Ensure accidents, incidents, near misses and reports of work related ill-health are investigated and appropriate remedial action is identified and implemented in a timely manner;

- Monitor the health and safety performance of employees within their areas of responsibility and considering the recommendations of supervisors and employees to improve performance;
- Ensure their Head of Service is informed of any relevant health and safety issues, especially those that have resource implications and for those that cannot be resolved at local level.

Team Leaders, Managers and Supervisors

All managers and supervisors are primarily responsible for ensuring the implementation of this policy within their areas of responsibility.

Specifically, managers and supervisors will:

- Assist managers with health and safety risk assessments, with the involvement of employees and ensuring the risk assessments are implemented;

- Communicate the content of risk assessments and safe systems of work to employees;
- Ensure contents of risk assessments are communicated to employees along with any safe systems of work where appropriate;
- Ensure employees attend health and safety training and health surveillance where identified so that they can undertake their tasks safely without endangering themselves or others;
- Ensure systems are in place so that all plant and equipment used is adequately tested, maintained and that comprehensive records are kept of all tests in accordance with statutory requirements and best practice;
- Monitor the health and safety performance of employees and resolving any unsafe working;
- Ensure all work related accidents, incidents, near misses and ill-health are reported and investigated in line with council procedures;
- Consult and co-operate with employees and their safety representatives;
- Ensure escalation of any relevant health and safety issues, especially those that have resource implications and for those that cannot be resolved at local level;
- Act upon any instances of serious or imminent danger in a timely manner and report to senior management and Council Health and Safety Team.

All Employees

All employees will:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of any other person who may be affected by their actions or omissions at work;
- Report to their line manager any unsafe practices or systems of work, unsafe working conditions, near misses, damage to plant, machinery or equipment, accidents, violent incidents or dangerous occurrences;
- Adhere to the requirements of risk assessments, safe working procedures, training information and instruction in relation to their work;
- Make full and proper use of the appropriate equipment, personal protective equipment and all safety devices;
- Co-operate with the Council, managers and supervisors so as to enable them to carry out their own responsibilities as defined in this policy;
- Not to intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety and welfare;
- Attended Health and Safety training and health surveillance commensurate with their role and activities undertaken;
- Act upon any instances of serious or imminent danger in a timely manner and report to senior management and Council Health and Safety Team.

Health and Safety Compliance Manager

The Occupational Health and Safety Manager provides assistance to the Elected Members, the Chief Executive and other Directors in meeting their health and safety responsibilities to employees and others.

The Health and Safety Compliance Manager will:

- Lead and manage the Council's Occupational Health and Safety service to ensure the development and review of corporate policies and practices to support the Council's objectives and to meet legislative requirements;
- Allocate lead health and safety officers and appropriate health and safety resources for each Service;
- Give advice on Council health and safety policy formulation and development;

- Give advice to Elected members and all employees so as to promote a positive health and safety culture and to secure the effective implementation of policy;
- Give advice in planning for health and safety, including the setting of realistic short and long term objectives, deciding priorities and establishing adequate performance standards;
- Analyse accident and ill-health data to assist in the elimination of hazards and reduction of risk in order to reduce work related accidents, incidents, ill-health and hazards in order to reduce injuries to employees and others and to minimise costs;
- Maintain up-to-date information systems on legislative requirements, official guidance and developments in health and safety management practice;
- Assist the Director of Resources in the annual review of this health and safety performance;
- Monitor the implementation of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy, health and safety plans and advise Directors, managers and others as appropriate;
- Advise and assist training and development colleagues regarding the provision of health and safety training to support the successful implementation of this policy and supporting systems. Liaise with service management regarding training needs, course content and competence of health and safety training providers;
- Design and deliver audit and monitoring systems to ensure Directors have carried out their responsibilities;
- Maintain procedures for the reporting of work-related accidents, incidents and ill-health;
- Take the lead on communications and consultations with relevant enforcing authorities;
- Conduct and co-ordinate investigations into incidents and, where necessary, report to the Directors and Chief Executive, and recommend and monitor remedial action and interim measures where necessary;
- Assist in leading the review and promotion of the council H&S strategy;
- Develop and lead on H&S partnership arrangements and service level agreements;
- Co-ordinate and monitor the provision and implementation of safety policies, procedures and guidance for all services;
- Support Services management teams and service-specific health and safety forums.

Occupational Health Service

Provides a broad range of occupational health advice and services to the Council with the aim of ensuring that appropriate measures are considered in order to maintain health and wellbeing of employees whilst complying with relevant legislation and best practice.

Senior Occupational Health Physician

The Senior Occupational Health Physician will:

- Act in a clinical governance leadership role, ensuring the provision of continuously improving, high quality occupational health services;
- Provide advice to the Council on medical aspects of Health and Safety, based on current evidence;
- Develop appropriate evidence based occupational medical fitness standards for specific occupational groups based on statutory requirements and best practice;
- Oversee the development and approval of occupational health policies, procedures, protocols and audits which are evidence based, compliant with legislation and which meet appropriate professional and ethical standards;

- Develop a protocol which facilitates the provision of occupational immunisation programmes across the Council for at risk occupational groups;
- Assist the Council's Health and Safety Team in the research, development and review of health related corporate policies;
- Carry out medical assessments and examinations where legal requirements are appropriate to specific occupations, including acting as a HSE 'Appointed Doctor' as required.

Occupational Health Service

Occupational Health Service Team will:

- Collaborate with the Occupational Health and Safety Manager in ensuring that the use and direction of the Occupational Health Services are risk based;
- Provide an independent advisory service staffed by professionally qualified Occupational Health Nurse Practitioners and Occupational Health Physician offering employees and managers advice and guidance on workplace health;
- Provide pre placement assessments and advice on workplace aids, adaptations and adjustments as appropriate in accordance with health and safety legislation and employment law;
- Provide ongoing advice to employees and managers in relation to fitness to work; return to work following sickness absence; reasonable adjustments; disability; health and safety implications and rehabilitation;
- Provide the administration and provision of statutory health surveillance programmes based on appropriate risk assessments. Audit the clinical outcomes on a regular basis to assist in assessing the effectiveness of workplace control measures;
- Provide occupational immunisation programmes as identified by risk assessment such as Hepatitis A and B, in addition to advising on cases of occupational inoculation injury;
- Ensure appropriate confidential focused psychological support services are available to all employees;
- Ensure the provision of timely advice on musculoskeletal conditions, including provision of assessment and initial treatment where appropriate;
- Promote the development of workplace health improvements by providing advice on relevant topics in the form of individual health education and during group presentations.

Trade Union and Employee Health & Safety Representatives

The council encourages working in partnership with Trade Unions and Employee Health and Safety representatives. Trade union and employees representatives can;

- Contribute to the identification, elimination or control of possible risks to employees' health and safety;
- Work with the employer and employees to investigate accidents and incidents that caused or had the potential to cause injury or ill-health to employees;
- Take an active role and work closely with the Council Health & Safety Teams and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group;
- Represent employees in discussions with HSE inspectors and receive information from those inspectors;
- Promote safe working practice and advise employees on health and safety standards and procedures;
- Carry out joint safety inspections, with representatives of the Authority, to identify possible hazards to assist the Authority in the provision of a safe working environment;

- Be afforded reasonable time off to carry out these duties in accordance with The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)

CLT is composed of the Chief Executive and Directors and is the management team for the Council. It provides the opportunity for the Chief Executive to consult with other Directors regarding the Council's health and safety management system, and the development of corporate objectives.

It is the responsibility of CLT to formally accept their collective role in making the recommendations to cabinet for the setting of corporate policy for the control of health and safety risks within the council.

Each Corporate Director has direct responsibility for ensuring requirements and standards are met within their service grouping and that they have systems in place to achieve and maintain the effective and efficient management of health and safety.

CLT may receive advice directly from the Corporate Director of Resources, the Occupational Health and Safety Manager and Occupational Health Physician, but the Chief Executive will have ultimate responsibility for all decisions taken.

CLT will:

- Assist the Chief Executive in his responsibilities for major policy decisions, the adequate provision of finance, resources, and management arrangements;
- Review health and safety performance at least annually;
- Ensure that the Council Health and Safety Policy reflects the current priorities of CLT;
- Be kept informed about significant health and safety failures and the outcome of the investigations into their causes;
- Ensure that suitable and sufficient resources are made available for the management of health and safety;
- Review health and safety performance at least annually;
- Ensure delegated duties and responsibilities are appropriately assigned, understood, capable of achievement, accepted and implemented;
- Ensure relevant health and safety reports are given due consideration at the senior management team (SMT) meetings.

2. Organisation

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group

This group is made up of management representatives and trade union representatives from all Services all trade unions. The Corporate Director of Resources, who reports directly to the Chief Executive, chairs the group. Meetings are held quarterly, however emergency meeting can be convened with the agreement of the Chairperson.

The main objectives and functions of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group will be:

- To keep under review the measures taken to ensure the health and safety at work of the Council's employees;
- Monitoring Health and Safety performance of the Council and propose attainable objectives and targets for consideration by CLT;
- Monitor progress of strategic and service action plans and policy implementation;
- To promote co-operation between managers and employees in instigating, developing and carrying out measures to ensure the health and safety at work of employees;
- To act as a forum for the exchange of information, the sharing of views and the development of ideas on health & safety issues between managers and trade unions;
- To consider any relevant general or corporate issue referred to it by service health and safety groups and make recommendations to the committee on matters of a general or corporate nature;
- Devising a monitoring scheme for health and safety performance within the services;
- Formulating annual objectives for health and safety within the services for agreement with the service senior management teams;
- Ensuring dissemination of relevant information within the services.

Service Health and Safety Groups

Each Director will establish a health and safety working group made up of management representatives, H&S lead officers and Trade Union or employee representatives from all divisions or sections of the Service. The primary purpose of the Service Health and Safety Groups will be to develop and review the Service health and safety management system in line with council policy and legislative requirements.

Specifically the Service Health and Safety Group will be responsible for:

- Developing and reviewing the Service health and safety policies, procedural arrangements and generic working practices;
- Monitoring health and safety performance of the service grouping and propose attainable objectives and targets for consideration by the senior management team;
- Monitor progress of service H&S action plans;
- Monitoring the implementation of the risk assessment process throughout the Service;
- Reviewing external or internal health and safety audit reports and monitor progress against any actions and targets;
- Developing a health and safety training strategy;
- Receiving information from the Council Health and Safety Team and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group, commenting on and implementing new policies/ procedures within the Service;
- Monitoring the quarterly accident statistics, identifying trends and implementing accident reduction programmes where appropriate;
- Assisting in the production and review of council health and safety quarterly and annual reports;
- Ensuring dissemination of relevant information within the Service.

3. Arrangements

To assist in the application of this policy and as part of the Councils Health and Safety Management system, a series of Council Codes of Practice and guidance have been developed which individually detail arrangements for H&S.

The codes of practice satisfy statutory requirements, guidance and best practice in relation to health and safety legislation.

Each code of practice is accompanied by brief guidance notes to assist managers in its interpretation.
The codes of practice detail the arrangements required in relation to key aspects of health and safety management such as:

- Safe Systems of Work
- Accident Reporting
- First Aid
- Risk Assessment
- Health Surveillance
- Violence at Work
- Lone Working
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Training
- Welfare
- Fire Safety
- Emergency procedures
- Electricity
- Asbestos
- Hazardous substances
- Construction, Design and Management
- Contractor selection and management
- Maintenance of plant and equipment
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Audit, monitoring and inspection

The above list is not exhaustive and codes of practice will be developed, reviewed or superseded subject to legislative requirements, best practice and organisational changes and development.

The codes of practice need to be applicable to the variety of management structures and work activities encompassed by all service groupings of the Council. They have been written in a format that is generally applicable to all services. The Council Health and Safety team will work with service groupings to apply the legislative requirements in particular divisions or sections of services.

Within many of the codes of practice are phrases and terminology that are drawn directly from Acts, Regulations and Guidance. The interpretation will vary according to the circumstances in which they are applied, therefore detailed explanations of the standards have not been provided in this policy document. Advice and guidance on application of the required standards can be obtained from:

- The Council health and Safety team which includes dedicated service specific health and safety advice.

The Codes of Practice can be accessed via line managers and the Council Health and Safety Team intranet pages. Hard copies are also available upon request from line managers or the Council Health and Safety Team.

4. Supporting Information

What is the policy about?

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 imposes general duties on employers. Section 2(3) of the Act states that every employer shall prepare (and as often as may be appropriate revise) a written statement of his general policy with respect to:

- the health and safety at work of his employees; and
- the organisation and arrangements in force for carrying out that policy, and bring the statement and any revision of it to the notice of all his employees.

This policy has 3 main aims:

- To fulfil our legal obligations under Section 2(3) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974;
- To demonstrate by means of comprehensive performance standards, that the Council understands and acknowledges its legal obligations at the highest corporate level;
- To provide performance criteria that lists our obligations under all relevant health and safety statutes and assist DCC to demonstrate compliance.

Who does the policy apply to?

This policy covers all employees and elected members. The policy is recommended as good practice to all other groups associated with the Council who have the discretion in their employment to adopt our policies. Apart from schools, this will include such groups as voluntary sector organisations.

In writing this policy consideration was given to working partnerships between DCC and external agencies. All DCC employees will be covered by this policy and external agencies employees will work to their employers H&S Policy and arrangements unless a contractual agreement is made between all parties.

Responsibility

The County Council has the overarching responsibility for protecting health and safety by ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, conformance with statutory duty and maintaining standards in accordance with best practice.

Monitoring

The Health and Safety Team, Human Resources & Organisational Development will monitor relevant health and safety legislation and make any adjustments to this policy.

Support

To assist Services in the application of this policy health and safety support will be delivered via the Council Health and Safety Team.

Dealing with abuses of the policy

Employees who attempt to abuse this policy may face disciplinary action. DCC takes false or misleading accusations very seriously which may result in further action taken through the Disciplinary Procedure. This will not include ill-founded allegations that were made in good faith.

Publicising/distribution of the policy

A copy of this policy is available for key personnel within the Services and will be made available to employees on request. A copy can also be viewed via the Intranet. New employees will be informed of the existence of this policy in recruitment and induction information. A copy of the statement of intent will be made available to all employees via the Employee's Health and Safety Handbook.

4.
Supporting Information

Reviewing the policy

The content of this policy will be kept under review as per the schedule drawn up by the Health and Safety Team, Human Resources & Organisational Development and such changes will be made to the policy as deemed appropriate following necessary consultation.

Equality and Diversity

DCC are committed to including equalities in everything we do. This includes the elimination of unlawful discrimination, promoting diversity as a positive force and valuing & celebrating our diverse workforce and community.

An equality impact assessment will be carried out in the preparation of this policy and the assessment will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Alternative formats

Where any alternative format is required, any initial enquiry should be made through line managers.

Further information

If you would like any further advice on this document you can contact the council's Health and Safety Team on 03000 263430.

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