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HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

The HSE Board

HSE Narrative

A Paper by Colin Douglas

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Cleared by Colin Douglas on 20 February 2006

Issue

1. To agree the narrative describing the successes of HSE over the years, and where we hope to be in five years time.

Timing

2. For HSE Board on 1 March 2006.

Recommendation

3. That the Board agrees:
 - a) the narrative, attached as an Annex to this paper
 - b) the approach to communicating it as set out in Presentation section at paragraph 9

Background

4. At the SCS Leadership Meeting in October, it was agreed that HSE would benefit from a vision/narrative describing where we are going and providing a consistent point of reference for staff to use in planning and prioritising their work. The subsequent Board meeting established a Board sub-group, chaired by me, with the purpose of producing a narrative by March which would set out: our achievements over the past 30 years, our future direction, and what this means for how we work.

Argument

5. The narrative is set out as an annex to this paper. It aims to strike an appropriate balance between the past and future. It also seeks to strike a difficult balance by capturing the right themes and being inclusive on the one hand, and on the other hand being brief and readable.
6. The Board is, therefore, invited to consider whether the accompanying narrative achieves the objectives set out in paragraph 5, or if amendments are required to it.

Consultation

7. The Board sub-group, involving myself, Giles Denham, Kevin Myers, Sandra Caldwell and Peter Buckley, has overseen the development and drafting of this narrative. The narrative was also discussed, in outline, at Whitley, and shared in draft with our Trade Unions.
8. Two earlier iterations of the narrative were tested with a small selection of staff drawn from the 'Pulse Panel'.

Presentation

9. Once finalised, the narrative will be placed onto the Intranet site, in the Big Picture pages, and we will bring attention to it through an item in e-express. Since it arises out of a specific commitment at an SCS meeting, it is proposed to circulate it to the SCS for information just before it goes live on the Intranet.

Financial/Resource Implications for HSE

10. A significant amount of staff time has been taken in developing the narrative to date, but no further significant resource commitments are planned.

Action

11. If the Board agrees the recommendations set out in paragraph 3 above, the Internal Communications team will make arrangements to put the narrative onto the Intranet and promote it internally.

HSE: our story

Our achievements

Goal setting health and safety legislation and the creation of the HSC and HSE were major milestones for workplace safety in the 1970s. We've come a long way since then.

Working with others, we've had a huge impact in British workplaces – lives have been saved, injuries and illnesses have been prevented. We have provided greater protection to workers and public whilst implementing a proportionate and risk based regime, enabling us to operate as an effective and modern regulator. We can be proud of these successes.

There's a high level of public and employer confidence in the regulation of health and safety in Britain. There is a strong belief that employers who are guilty of serious health and safety failures will be prosecuted.

We have effectively regulated hazardous industries, protecting workers onsite and members of the public offsite who might be affected by those activities. Our controls have enabled these industries to operate with a greater degree of public confidence than they would otherwise have enjoyed.

Our challenges

Our vision for the future builds on the successes of the past. We want to see health and safety as a cornerstone of a civilised society and, with that, to achieve a record of workplace health and safety that leads the world. As we move towards this vision, we face similar challenges from a changing workplace as other health and safety regulators across the world.

Among our challenges is the fact that the rate of improvement in workplace health and safety is slowing and there are new and emerging work-related health issues to be looked at.

We face a small, but persistent, group of critics who argue either that we impose too heavy a burden of regulation or, on the other hand, that we are too soft.

HSE alone can't tackle all these issues. With the support of an ever-growing number of partners, we can achieve significant improvements in health and safety and in the process also achieve the *Revitalising Health and Safety* and Public Services Agreement targets. Such partnership working is also important if we are to get a higher level of respect for sensible health and safety.

We must also maintain strong support from the Government, as an employer, to demonstrate the benefits of successful health and safety management.

HSE will need to be focused, resourceful, influential, efficient and effective if we are to make further real progress in these areas and to stay ahead of the game as a modern regulator.

Our future

So, what do we want HSE to look like five years from now? Our knowledge, independence and professionalism have always been respected. We must retain and build on these strengths.

We should be a regulator that delivers the results expected of us – and in doing so, maintain and achieve the respect not only of the public, workers and employers but also across government and by key opinion leaders. We must continue to use our credibility to articulate what sensible health and safety means, and defend it robustly.

We want to continue to develop a wider range of interventions, with the evidence of where each works best. We must then use the full range effectively and value equally the different skills that underpin them – new and old. Because there is to be a greater focus on occupational health, we must remain open to new approaches whilst retaining those established ones that work.

It's vital that we have a more diverse workforce so that we are better able to interact and understand the businesses and organisations we work with. After all, the workplace has changed dramatically since 1974. Part-time working has risen, women now make up half the workforce, and a significant proportion come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In the next five years, we want to see a united HSE. An HSE where there is greater trust. An HSE where everyone's contribution is valued, whether their role is in new developmental areas, or in established operational, scientific (including HSL), policy or business support functions. An HSE where we work to a common purpose across all organisational barriers, and have strengthened relations between management and staff and the unions that represent them. This will benefit us all, for there will be a more diverse range of employment opportunities and a clearer sense of direction.

And it won't just be HSE staff who will benefit. We will build on our reputation for transparency, and make ourselves more accessible. We will be more effective at listening, communicating with and influencing others. We will also be more aware of their priorities and their different working environments. In consequence, we will be more effective in achieving our goals.

Above all else, we will remain passionate about protecting people, especially the most vulnerable, by ensuring that health and safety risks in the changing workplace are properly managed.