

Health and Safety Executive Board Minutes		HSE/07/M6	
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Exemptions:	None		

HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE
Minutes of the HSE Board meeting held on
Wednesday 6th June 2007, Hope Room, Rose Court, London

Present

Geoffrey Podger	Justin McCracken	Jonathan Rees	Alex Brett-Holt
Sandra Caldwell	Colin Douglas	Giles Denham	Vivienne Dews
Patrick McDonald	Kevin Myers	Mike Weightman	Jane Willis

Apologies

Eddie Morland

Also attending

Steve Dennis, Peter Buckley (all items), Gaynor Coldrick (for items 2 and 3), Dave Thomas (item 2), Tim Beaumont and Peter Brown (for item 3), Heather Bolton and Clare McNicholas (for item 4), and Elizabeth Hodkinson, Tony Bandle, Debbie MacLeod, Heather Butler and Zoe Woodrow (for item 6).

Minutes René McTaggart

1 Minutes of the HSE Board held on 7 February and the Action Points

1.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed with a minor amendment to para 2.2 (a) which should now read:

“The Board sought clarification on the intended scope of the project which was confirmed as including all stakeholders including members of the public and duty holders”.

2 Agenda item 2 - Monthly Finance and Staffing update (Paper B/07/60 Closed)

2.1 This section of the minutes is closed.

3 Agenda item 3 Managing Sickness Absence (paper No B/07/62)

3.1 Vivienne Dews, Peter Brown and Tim Beaumont introduced the item and made the following comments:

- a. This was a joint paper by several members of the Board – all of which were thanked for their contribution this work;
- b. HSE has, in line with the recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce on Health Safety and Productivity report, policies, procedures and a means of monitoring sickness absence;
- c. Despite considerable effort HSE is not on course to meet the target of reducing sickness absence to 6.2 days per employee by the end of this work year. This was attributed to a lack of implementation of policies rather than a fault with the policies in place;
- d. More support for line managers is needed to ensure they are able,

- and comfortable, in taking steps to tackle sickness absence;
- e. The Board were invited to note the data provided in the paper and were challenged to provide leadership in helping to deliver improvements.

3.2 The Board welcomed the paper and discussed how to support this work, the comments made included:

- a. The Board were disappointed that despite the action taken that there had not been a reduction in sickness absence which cost HSE some £3.9m a year;
- b. The Board agreed that the aspirational target of 6.2 days by the end of 2009/10 was achievable especially as the demographics of HSE is similar to the private sector (ie a large proportion of male employees between 20 and 50 years old) which has an average of 6 days;
- c. The Board noted that parts of the organisation had an average below the target and were keen to ensure that any lessons were learnt from these pockets of success;
- d. The Board agreed it was important to establish the difference between the proposed target and efficiency savings;
- e. The Board noted that while there were not salary costs for some long term sickness absence cases, there was still a cost (20% of normal cost) for those no longer being paid;
- f. The Board agreed the need to use the information in the paper to identify where action was needed to prevent new cases of sickness absence as well as address existing cases;
- g. The Board acknowledged that stress was a leading reason for sickness absence and agreed the need to ensure the HSE stress policy was clearly understood and being appropriately adhered to;
- h. While central coordination of sickness absence work is needed, individual Directorates have a greater role to play in reducing absence levels.

3.3 The Board concluded the discussions by endorsing:

- a. the recommendations of the paper, including the setting up of a sickness absence task force for HSE;
- b. the need to continue with an evidence lead targeted approach;
- c. the need to inform staff of the findings of the paper by cascading, and discussing it as appropriate, within their own Directorates.

Action Point 57 **Board members to discuss findings of the paper with staff and revise Directorate stress action plans as necessary.**

4 **Agenda item 4 – COIN - Update on the roll-out of the Model Office (Paper B/07/64)**

4.1 Heather Bolton and Clare McNicholas introduced the paper and included the following points:

- a. The Board were reminded that they agreed at the January meeting to the national roll-out of the model office project and asked for an update on progress in June;
- b. Early feedback from the roll-out indicates it has generally been a

success so far. This success is attributable to the efforts of all the staff involved including the Directorate coordinators, the volunteer trainers, the staff in every office who have organized the training schedules, the management in all the offices who have supported the initiative and those attending the training and who are making best use of the system.

- c. The project team has continued to introduce enhancements to COIN to address the feedback from users on general usability issues. These will continue. Also, part of the evaluation of the roll-out includes a sample test of the number of mouse clicks needed to enter data and the accuracy of the data before and after training;
- d. The project team are working with representatives from each Directorate to agree a strategy for tackling data quality issues;
- e. The national roll out is due to be completed at the end of July. Internal Audit are carrying out a compliance check in 5 offices around the country to determine whether agreed business procedures are being followed on COIN after training;
- f. It was also acknowledged that some parts of HSE were still to receive their COIN training;
- g. An exercise has just started to review the original business benefits of introducing COIN and to determine a realistic benefits management plan. This work will continue through the autumn.

4.2 The Board formally thanked Heather, Clare and all those involved throughout HSE in contributing to the success in the national roll out of COIN model office training so far. The Board also:

- a. acknowledged the hard work undertaken so far and that to follow;
- b. were pleased to obtain reassurances that refinements to improve the data were being made and opportunities were being sought to learn lessons from the work so far;
- c. noted the need to ensure that the business benefits of introducing this system were reviewed as soon as possible.

Action Point 58 **COIN Roll out project team to report back to the Board with the results of the evaluation.**

5 **Agenda Item 5 – Speaking with consistency – advertising strap-line and key messages (paper no B/07/65)**

5.1 Colin Douglas introduced his paper explaining it covers two issues (the proposed strap-line and corporate messages) and made the following comments:

Strap-line

- a. The main challenge facing HSE's communications strategy is to get sufficient impact from advertising. HSE's campaigns need to stand out from other campaigns. To do this HSE needs to adapt its advertisements to ensure they achieve maximum impact each time;
- b. Communications Directorate suggest that HSE's advertisements need to be issue specific, rather than general health and safety messages, while being tied to a continuing theme (similar to, for example, the road safety campaign which covers a range of issues but is tied to the strap-line – THINK!);

Corporate Messages

- c. Corporate messages are inherently defensive as they are designed to show what we are doing to improve health and safety.

5.2 The Board discussed the proposed approach and made the following remarks:

Strap-line

- a. The Board noted that the proposed strap-line (Don't chance it – Change it) could be perceived as advising people to be risk adverse rather than take sensible risk management precautions. However, it was also agreed that this 'sophisticated' view was not likely to reflect the perception of the target audience;
- b. The Board agreed in principle to an overarching strap-line tied to specific advertisements. However, the Board also acknowledged that it will need to be used carefully and not exceed its limits – for example, it will not be appropriate for all advertisements relating to health issues.

Corporate Messages

- c. The Board agreed that replacing all the existing corporate messages was not necessary at this stage and that it was important to ensure corporate messages are appropriately used. Any review would need to take account of the views of the new Chair.

5.3 The Board, having noted Commissioner Judith Donovan's involvement in this work, agreed that the Commission should be given the opportunity to consider and approve any proposals before they are used.

Action Point 59 **Colin Douglas to revisit the corporate messages and consult the Commission on the proposals after the September HSE meeting.**

6 **Agenda Item 6 – Improving health and safety information to SMEs (paper no B/07/66)**

6.1 Elizabeth Hodgkinson gave a brief introduction to the item by outlining the work in progress and the proposals for developing a framework for improving HSE's communication with SMEs. Elizabeth asked the Board to consider the proposed action and endorse the recommendations set out in the paper.

6.2 The Board thanked Elizabeth for her concise introduction and held a wide ranging discussion which included the following points:

- a. The Board noted the comments made by Commissioner Judith Donovan (at the 5th June HSC meeting) who expressed concern that messages to small firms were often 'dumbed down' without justification. The Board noted that Judith Donovan had approved this paper;
- b. The Board also noted that HSE's experience (for example in the development of Workplace Health Connect) is that often even where information has been made simple, the drive from SME's is to make it simpler still;
- c. The Board noted that the risk to delivery, posed by the layers of process in the action plan, will need to be carefully managed;

- d. The Board acknowledged the professionalism and skill of staff dealing with SMEs on a daily basis but welcomed the opportunity to ensure improvements are made in understanding the SME perspective at a corporate level. Any action, therefore, to improve practical understanding of SMEs would be beneficial across the organisation;
- e. The Board agreed that it was important to maintain efforts to work with SME's through intermediaries but that it was also important to seek new opportunities to develop relationships with new intermediaries;
- f. While the Board agreed that guidance to staff on dealing with SMEs was sensible it raised concerns about the amount of guidance to staff more generally that has recently be placed on the HSE intranet. Therefore it was agreed that any new guidance would need to be reviewed, and streamlined as necessary, as part of the planned wider review of guidance for HSE staff;
- g. The Board recognised the importance of engaging SMEs and learning from HSE's considerable experience. In particular, the Board highlighted the need to make links with related HSE projects to ensure the framework takes account of the 'big picture.'
- h. The Board also noted that this is 'work in progress', and agreed to a fuller discussion in the autumn.

6.3 Geoffrey Podger thanked Elizabeth and her team and concluded the discussion by expressing the Board's agreement to the recommendations subject to the points raised above.

Action point 60 Elizabeth Hodkinson to progress with this work as outlined in the paper and report back to the Board on developments in the Autumn.

Action point 61 Justine McCracken to report to the Board on the progress with the review of guidance to staff at a future meeting.

7 Agenda Item 7 – Update on Nuclear Issues (no papers)

Mike Weightman provided an update for Board colleagues on:

- a. The contingency preparation since the previous discussion at the Board early in the year for any generic design assessment of new reactors. Mike noted the very valuable assistance provided by colleagues, especially the Legal Advisors Office;
- b. the present position and next steps following the recent HSC Direction to begin generic design assessment;
- c. The Government's White Paper and new Consultation document on the future of nuclear power in Britain.

The Board thanked Mike and his team for their work and made the following remarks in response:

- a. The Board were assured that HSE's decision making will remain robust, and trusted, with the assistance of the proposed advisory review board's work that would include key stakeholders;
- b. the Board reiterated their endorsement of the need for ND to recruit to fill resource and skills gaps;
- c. The Board noted the aim of Nuclear Directorate (ND) to work with policy colleagues to ensure that NuSAC are in a position to take a

- more strategic role in dealing with nuclear issues;
- d. The Board noted the need to respond to any change in departmental responsibility for the civil nuclear industry - particularly if it moves from DTI, with whom we have established a good working relationship.

8 Agenda Item 8 – Draft Agenda for the July 07 meeting

- 8.1 The Board agreed the agenda subject to the items on Gang-masters being moved to the August agenda and the Fundamental Review Action plan paper being moved below the line.

9 Any Other Business

Update from the Sounding Board on the HSC/E merger

- 9.1 Jonathan Rees provided a brief outline of the main developments from the sounding board meeting held on 5th June. His remarks included:
 - a. The Commission were now fully up to speed and engaged in the development of proposals to enable the merger;
 - b. It is proposed that a new single body be established that will be responsible for all the functions currently carried out by the Commission and the Executive;
 - c. There are still issues to be resolved around how to ensure the broader enforcement decision making responsibilities (eg. approval of safety cases, licensing regimes, etc) are transferred to the new body while ensuring that only competent people make the decisions. This will likely be resolved through the development of a decision making framework rather than through primary legislation;
 - d. The work to finalise the merger will need to learn from the experiences of other similar bodies;
 - e. HSE staff would remain Civil Servants;
 - f. Ministerial agreement has been obtained on the use of a regulatory reform order to give effect to the legislative changes needed to formally constitute the new body.
- 9.2 The Board thanked Jonathan for his update and agreed that further work was needed to bridge any gaps between the Commission and Executive's views on enforcement.