

The Highland Council
Central Safety Committee

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 30 October, 2015 at 11.30 a.m.

Present:

Employer's Representatives:

Mr B Fernie
Mr A MacKinnon
Mr F Parr

Staff Side Representatives:

Mr M Hayes, UNISON
Mr D Griffiths, GMB
Mr C Cameron, UCATT

In attendance:

Mr J Batchelor, Head of People and Performance, Corporate Development Service
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Corporate Development Service
Ms D Sutherland, Audit and Risk Manager, Finance Service
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Corporate Development Service

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Dr D Alston and Mrs M Smith of the Employer's Side, Mr A Wemyss of the Staff Side, Ms D Grant, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Health & Safety Working Group, and Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Appointment of Health and Safety Champion

Mr B Fernie was unanimously appointed by the Committee as Health and Safety Champion for the Council.

4. Minutes of Last Meeting

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 14 August, 2015, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

Item 1 – Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair – The Staff Side advised that their nomination for Vice-Chair of the Committee was Mr D Griffiths. Mr Griffiths was duly appointed as Vice Chair of the Committee.

Item 10 – Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team: Revised Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies – It was queried if the action from the last meeting, namely, an instruction that employees in Building Maintenance not to use their own power tools would be disseminated to all staff in Building Maintenance.

The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager undertook to clarify this and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

Item 11 – Occupational Health Report – In relation to the issue of different rates for Occupational Health and Business mileage, it had been agreed that travel to medical examinations (16.1p per mile) should be classed as business mileage (45p per mile) and be covered by the corporate Travel and Subsistence Policy. Subsistence rates would also be as per the corporate policy and employees attending examinations would claim in the normal way via expenses claims.

The Staff Side welcomed this decision.

6. Minutes of Area Health and Safety Groups

There had been circulated, for information, the Minutes of the:-

- i. Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Joint Health and Safety Working Group held on 21 October, 2015;
- ii. Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 3 September, 2015;
- iii. Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 3 September, 2015.

The Committee **NOTED** the Minutes.

Arising from the minutes, there was a concern that attendance at Area Health and Safety Groups had diminished considerably. The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager would be contacting Service Directors to ensure that this matter was addressed.

7. Finance Service – Health, Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan

There was circulated Report No. CSC/17/15 by the Audit and Risk Manager which introduced the Finance Service's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Action Plan for 2015/16 for approval by the Committee.

It was advised that a number of tasks had been identified which would be taken forward within the Service, mainly through the Health and Safety Group. Progress

against the Action Plan would be monitored by the Group and updates provided to the Finance Management Team.

It was requested that dates of meetings for the Finance Service's Health and Safety Group be circulated to the Staff Side.

The Action Plan contained an action to complete a formal programme of risk assessments to be introduced. In this respect, in terms of Finance staff visiting client's homes, there were processes in place to mitigate and manage violence and aggression against staff, which included checking the Register of people who had a history of violence against staff, prior to any visit.

In relation to the Service Point relocation from Church Street, Inverness to the Town House, the Staff Side had concerns regarding the consultation for this relocation as all Services who had staff working in the Service Point should have been consulted and risk assessments carried out. Also, the Council should have a template for the design of interview rooms in the new Service Point with regard to mitigating and managing violence and aggression towards staff. Any interview room which was used to interview a person, when there may be a risk of violence or aggression towards staff, should have a basic design criteria to mitigate the risk of violence to staff, e.g. the room should be of a reasonable size, it should have good lighting, it should have an alarm, and the doors to the room should open out the way. Further, it was advised that Police Scotland in their Crime Prevention Department had an Architectural Design Officer who could advise on the design of interview rooms to mitigate violence and aggression to staff.

Once an interview design template had been approved, all Council buildings with interview rooms would need to be assessed against the template. It was suggested that there should be consultation with the Central Safety Committee when interview rooms were being designed. In terms of the Town House refurbishment, this was happening now, and therefore input into the design of the interview rooms was urgently required. It was suggested that the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager meet with the Inverness City Area Manager to advise him of the concerns of the Staff Side regarding the design of the interview rooms at the Town House, with a site visit being arranged.

The Committee:

- i **APPROVED** the Finance Service's Health, Safety, and Wellbeing Action Plan for 2015/16;
- ii **NOTED** that dates of meetings for the Finance Service's Health and Safety Group would be circulated to the Staff Side;
- iii **AGREED** that a template design criteria for interview rooms be used in the design of all Council interview rooms in future;
- iv **AGREED** that The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager would meet with the Inverness City Area Manager to discuss concerns regarding the interview rooms at the Town House, with a site visit also being undertaken.

8. **Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team: Update on Current Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues**

There was circulated Report No. CSC/18/15 by the Head of People and

Performance which provided an update on current health and safety issues and developments in relation to Health and Safety Executive issues; Health and Safety management system updates; Radon Management and projects.

In particular it was advised that progress had been made by the Property Team with regard to the management of radon-related issues identified as a result of the radon sampling programme. The Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England had been kept informed throughout the works taking place. It was queried if radon levels could reach a level that people could not stay in domestic properties. It was advised that it was possible, but only after all engineering measures to reduce the radon levels had been exhausted. A point was made that Radon was the second highest cause of lung cancer in America and was a serious issue.

In terms of monitoring Radon levels in offices and commercial depots etc. it was advised that these premises were monitored on an 'at risk to radon exposure basis', and there was a monitoring programme in place. The Radon Working Group was recommending that in future new builds be protected against Radon gas e.g fitting a membrane.

It was advised that a group looking at improving the reporting of violent incidents in schools had been established, and a new incident report/investigation template was being developed for use in schools. The GMB union were conducting a survey of its members to identify how big a problem violent incidents were in schools and why it was happening. This was a national problem and it would be good to have a concerted approach to this issue with other Local Authorities. Stress levels amongst employees in Care and Learning were consistently the highest of any Service in the Council and there was a need to look at how to train and support staff in schools.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report; and
- ii **AGREED** to the amendments in the health and safety guidance documents.

9. Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Annual Report

There was circulated Report No. CSC/19/15 by the Head of People & Performance which presented the Council's occupational health, safety and wellbeing (OHSW) performance, achievements and progress in 2014/2015 and presented the plan for 2014/15.

A comment was made that it could take some considerable time for new employees to receive health and safety training and it was queried if essential health and safety training could be carried out during the induction process. It was confirmed that essential health and safety training should be carried out during the employee induction process. The Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager undertook to re-enforce this message to Managers.

In terms of the departure of the current Fire Safety Adviser, it was confirmed that this vacancy would be advertised. There was a significant job to do in respect of fire safety risk assessments in workplaces, particularly schools. The Staff Side undertook to raise the issue of fire safety risk assessments in schools at the Care and

Learning Service Health and Safety Group and would report back to a future meeting. It was advised that the Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing team would monitor fire safety risk assessments undertaken on schools. The Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager undertook to report back on work undertaken on fire safety inspections carried out in schools.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the contents of the report;
- ii **NOTED** that the Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager would re-enforce the message to Managers that essential health and safety training should be carried out during the employee induction process;
- ii **NOTED** that the Staff Side would raise the issue of fire safety inspection in schools at the next meeting of the Care and Learning Service Health and Safety Group and would report back to this Committee; and
- iii **AGREED** that the Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager would report back on work currently being undertaken on fire safety inspections in schools.

10. Occupational Health Report

There was circulated Report No. CSC/20/15 by the Head of People & Performance which provided an overview of the work undertaken by RS Occupational Health for the period July - September, 2015.

Of significant concern were the number of employees who failed to turn up for occupational health appointments. For this period, a total of 39 employees did not attend appointments. The Council had been charged almost £4k for these missed appointments. The Head of People and Performance and The Occupational, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager were to investigate the reasons for these missed appointments. The Staff Side were concerned as to why employees were failing to turn up for appointments and requested that they be kept informed of progress in the investigation.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** the information contained in the report; and
- ii **AGREED** that a report be submitted to the next meeting on the outcome of the investigation into the reasons why employees were not attending occupational health appointments.

11. Self-referrals to Occupational Health/Employee Assistance Programmes

There was circulated Report No. CSC/21/15 by the Head of People and Performance which outlined the potential benefits of self-referrals to occupational health and types of Employee Assistance Programmes together with estimates of the cost of introducing such Services to the Highland Council.

The Committee was asked to consider the benefits which could be derived from the introduction of an Employee Assistance Programme or self-referral systems to Occupational Health and advise on staff-side views on the options for providing additional support to employees.

It was advised that should it be decided to proceed with either an Employee Assistance Programme or self-referral system, then a bid for funding for it would require to be included in the current budget process.

The Staff Side were supportive of such services being provided for employees and such a service should help reduce absence from work. A point was made though that the root causes of stress amongst employees should be identified, and if this could be addressed, then the need for occupational health assistance would be diminished. It was advised that a stress tool kit was being developed for use by managers, and it was proposed that mental health first aiders be introduced in the Council, and mental health awareness training was available.

If employees found that they were having difficulty obtaining occupational health services through their Managers, then they could seek assistance to access this service from Human Resources.

It was felt that people had a problem with treating stress as a mental health issue and preferred to keep it quiet, so perhaps a self-referral service would help encourage employees come forward with stress related problems.

The proposed services could help save money in the long term and if it was decided to proceed with one of the options, then a cost benefit analysis would be done to ascertain the return on investment from providing the service.

It was advised that self-referral systems and employee assistance programmes were very successful in other local authorities.

It was suggested that an Employee Assistance Programme be chosen as the preferred option, and if funding for it was identified in the budget process, it be introduced and the programme be reviewed after a period of one year. Once the Employee Assistance Programme was implemented it was suggested that a letter be issued to all employees advising them of this new service and also explain the current options for seeking occupational health services. Quarterly reports on the new programme would be reported to this Committee.

In terms of the procurement for this service, the possibility of undertaking a joint procurement with other Authorities for the provision of this service would be looked at.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

- i to support an Employee Assistance Programme being introduced and that it be reviewed after a period of one year.
- ii that subject to funding being made available for the new Programme, a communication be issued to all employees advising them of the new Programme and also the current options for seeking occupational health services.

The meeting concluded at 1.05p.m.