

**The Highland Council  
Central Safety Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Central Safety Committee held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday 3 May 2019 at 12 noon.

**Present:**

**Employer's Representatives:**

Mr A MacKinnon  
Mr M Reiss  
Mr G MacKenzie  
Mr R Gale

**Staff Side Representatives:**

Mr D Griffiths, GMB  
Mr M Hayes, UNISON  
Mr I MacLeman, UNITE/UCATT

**In attendance:**

Mr S Walsh, Head of People and ICT, Corporate Resources Service  
Ms G Falconer, Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Corporate Resources Service  
Mrs C Campbell, Head of Performance and Resources, Community Services  
Mr F MacDonald, Head of Property Services, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Mr S Duncan, Property Manager, Development & Infrastructure Service  
Mr I Jackson, Education Officer, Care and Learning Service  
Ms D Sutherland, Corporate Audit Manager, Corporate Resources Service  
Mr C Mackenzie, Insurance Officer, Corporate Resources Service  
Mr W Munro, Inverness, Nairn and Badenoch & Strathspey Operational Area Health and Safety Working Group  
Ms H Ross, Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Health & Safety Working Group (by telephone conference)  
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant, Chief Executive's Service

**Mr D Griffiths in the Chair**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of Last Meeting**

There had been circulated Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 1 February, 2019, the terms of which were **APPROVED**.

**4. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

Arising from the Minutes the following matters were raised:-

i - it was confirmed that information had been sent to Councillor D Loudon on the routine changing of filter maintenance of ventilation systems at Council Headquarters, Inverness and it was confirmed that there was a process for changing filters.

ii – Reference was made to 7 drug/suicide related deaths in January, 2019 in Caithness and it was advised that local Elected Members were doing what they could to help address this issue. The Council had arranged a number of suicide intervention training programmes.

## 5. 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 3 April, 2019;
- (ii) Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Health and Safety Working Group held on 4 April, 2019; and
- (iii) Ross, Skye and Lochaber Health and Safety Group held on 21 March, 2019.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Health and Safety Group Minutes.

Arising from the Minutes the following points were raised:

### i Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey Minute

Diriebught Depot – it was noted that a review of traffic management had been completed at the depot and while there had been significant improvements, work was still needed to ensure that Managers at the depot work together to implement the traffic management plan.

At the last meeting of the Committee it was reported that resources had been made available for the supply of portacabins for welfare facilities at Diriebught Depot and tenders for the work from suppliers were due on 1 February, 2019. The position now was that the Service believed that all the tenders received were too expensive and the Service were now looking at a different approach to the supply of welfare facilities at the depot.

The Staff Side were disappointed that there was not sufficient funding for the supply of these facilities to address health and safety issues. The Staff Side did acknowledge the financial challenges facing the Council and had agreed that the Council could project manage this internally with a current timescale for completion of October, 2019. The Service were considering purchasing flat pack units that could be used for welfare facilities and fitted out by in house teams.

Mental Health Team – in relation to the relocation of the Mental Health team to HQ and the health, safety and security issues associated with this, it was queried what actions were proposed to address these issues. It was advised that two workplace inspections at HQ had identified numerous issues, particularly the risk to staff from violence and aggression and the need for improvements to the Reception area to address this risk.

It was explained that there was a review of improvements to Reception with a view to improving security and adapting the HQ building to suit Disability Discrimination Act requirements. There was not currently an all-encompassing plan for these improvements, however minor improvements to Reception would be made, pending the establishment of a formal project.

It was queried if there had been a risk assessment in relocating the Mental Health team to HQ, such as an interview room, as all projects should be risk assessed. It was advised that there was an interview room at HQ, but this was not adequate, for example, while there was a panic alarm in the room, there was no protocol for anyone to respond to it.

It was advised that a Programme Management Office had recently been established for implementing redesign projects, and at project initiation the Health and Safety team would be involved in risk assessing projects, but there was a need to ensure that this health and safety review was done for all Council projects.

This was an urgent issue as the Police have been called on two separate incidents for visitors to the Mental Health team at HQ and funding had to be found to remedy the problem. However, calling the Police was not an adequate control measure and the Council had a duty to ensure that staff were protected and there was no guarantee that the Police could respond urgently. Therefore, premises had to be designed and managed to protect staff.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED:-**

i that the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager liaise with appropriate Service representatives to address the health, safety and security issues at HQ as a result of the Mental Health team relocation to HQ; and

ii that all Council projects needed a risk assessment and for these assessments to be completed timeously.

Car Club – the Staff Side made reference to health and safety issues associated with the Car Club, specifically stress related concerns and whether the Council was acting contrary to existing health and safety legislation with regard to amendments to the Travel and Subsistence policy. The Staff Side understood that as a result of a review of the Grey Fleet (staff travel), effectively there was a blanket ban on staff using their own cars for Council business, other than for emergencies or where Car Club or public transport was not available and this was causing stress for staff.

In terms of including health and safety in any Council policy changes, travel was the likely to be the biggest risk to most staff at work and due to the Travel policy changes, staff were now forced to use cars supplied by the Council. The Council was required to undertake a risk assessment to ensure that staff were competent to drive the vehicle and that they were trained by a competent person and it was understood that this had not happened. Also, the use of Grey Fleet travel was supposed to be the more expensive option, but for the majority of operational staff who undertook multiple journeys, for journeys under 100 miles using their own car was still the most cost effective for the Council. Therefore, the Staff Side were requesting a retrospective review of the Travel and Subsistence Policy, particularly looking at areas of liability with the absence of implementing health and safety controls.

In response, the Project Manager for the Grey Fleet review explained that there was no blanket ban on Grey Fleet travel. There would always be situations where it would be cheaper to use your own car for Council business and this was recognised in the review. There would also be instances where employees own cars would be required to be used as they may be specially adapted for them or the type of passengers they were required to carry.

In terms of the update to the Travel and Subsistence Policy, this was approved at the HR Sub Group and trade union representatives were on this Group. It was advised that the Car Club was working well and staff were using the most cost effective form of travel. Further, in terms of training, a short video presentation was available on the use of electric cars and one to one training on electric vehicles and automatic vehicles was available to staff. Also, additional manual vehicles would be available for use in the Car Club. It was suggested that video training on the use of automatic vehicles be also provided to Car Club members.

As with all projects, a risk assessment of the Car Club was required as not everyone was competent in using electric vehicles and automatic vehicles. It was confirmed that all Car Club vehicles received regular health and safety checks.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

i that in order to clarify any misunderstandings, the guidance on the amended Travel and Subsistence Policy be reissued to Managers for them to disseminate the guidance to their staff; and

ii that the Staff Side would provide the list of statements referred to at the meeting to the Project Manager (Grey Fleet Travel) so that she could address them.

Chemical Store/Sprinkler System – Inverness Royal Academy – this issue had been discussed at both the Area Health and Safety Consultation Group and also at the Care and Learning Service Health and Safety Trade Union liaison Group. This duplication in discussion could potentially result in different actions being agreed on the same issue. It was suggested that the remit of Area Health and Safety Consultation Groups and Service Health and Safety Trade Union liaison Groups be reviewed to avoid such duplication.

In response, it was confirmed that the remits for both these Groups specifically identified their functions and responsibilities. The Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager undertook to reissue the remits to the Chairs of these Groups. It was also suggested that Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Group minutes be submitted to the Central Safety Committee in future.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED**:-

i that the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Manager reissue the remits of the Area Health and Safety Consultation Groups and the Service Health and Safety Trade Union Liaison Groups to the Chairs of these Groups; and

ii that Service Trade Union Health and Safety Liaison Group minutes be submitted to future meetings of the Central Safety Committee.

ii Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross Minute

Golspie High School – it was understood that a wall at Golspie High School had been hit by a lorry and was needing repaired to ensure the health and safety of the users of the building. The Property Manager undertook to check this out.

Responsible Premises Officers concerns – reference was made to concerns about the workload involved in delivering the duties within the RPO remit, the difficulty in getting staff to take on the role and whether other models of delivering RPO duties could be explored that might be more effective and impose less of a burden on a few individuals.

## **6. Insurance Information**

There was circulated Report No. CSC/5/19 by the Insurance Officer which provided an update on the Council's insurance activities for 2018/19 and covered the current insurance arrangements, a review of insurance performance, a commentary on the different claim types and various other insurance matters.

In terms of Employer's liability claims it was confirmed that there were no claims for work related stress in 2018/19.

A newspaper article had stated that the amount of compensation claims paid out by The Highland Council far exceeded that of other Councils. It was explained that other Councils had low excesses on their Insurance policies and therefore paid out less on claims. However, those Councils paid more for their Insurance policies. The Highland Council had a high excess on its policies, so paid out more on claims, but paid less for its Insurance cover. The Highland Council made an average saving of £1.7m a year by doing this.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **7. Property related health and safety issues**

There was circulated Report No. CSC/6/19 by the Director of Development & Infrastructure which provided an update on significant property related health and safety issues, any emerging future risks and new policy and procedures introduced.

In discussion in relation to water testing, it was understood that external contractors were undertaking water testing and it was queried if there were any plans to have this function undertaken in-house. It was confirmed that providing this service in-house was being considered.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## **8. Update on Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Issues**

There was circulated Report No. CSC/7/19 by the Head of People and ICT which provided an update on health and safety issues and developments for the Highland Council. It reviewed activities arising from Health and Safety Executive interventions; changes made to the health and safety management system and other activities undertaken since the last Committee meeting.

In discussion, there were anecdotal reports of Glyphosate (weedkiller) being sprayed on children's playground equipment. There may be no validity in these anecdotal reports, but this would be checked with the Head of Environmental and Amenity Services and information provided to Councillor G MacKenzie.

The Committee **NOTED** the updated information on health, safety and wellbeing issues and developments contained in the report.

## 9. Occupational Health Service Update

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/8/19 by the Head of People and ICT which provided an overview of the work undertaken by Iqarus, the Council's Occupational Health (OH) provider for the period January to March, 2019.

In particular it was noted that Iqarus had been awarded the Occupational Health contract and they would be in attendance at the next meeting of the Committee to give a presentation.

In relation to DNAs (Did Not Attend Appointments) as of 1 April, 2019, Services would be recharged for DNAs where there is not a reasonable explanation for the failure to turn up. The issue of DNAs would be discussed at the Executive Leadership team meeting as the costs involved of staff not attending OH appointments were unacceptable.

A point was made that of the examples provided of reasons given by staff for DNAs, the Service could not do anything about these and charging services for DNAs in these particular instances would have had no effect on DNAs.

In terms of mental health referrals, it was recommended that these should always be face to face OH appointments.

Following consideration, the Committee **NOTED** the Occupational Health activity for the last three months.

## 10. Trade Union Health & Safety Partnership Group Annual Report

There had been circulated Report No. CSC/9/19 by the Chairman of Joint Trades Union Health & Safety Representatives Group, which presented the Trade Union performance and progress in respect of meeting the objectives of the Partnership Agreement 2018.

In discussion, it had been considered using Trade Union Safety Representatives to undertake fire risk assessments, but given the limited number of Safety Representatives within the Council this may not be possible. The Staff Side advised that their Safety Representatives would like to be involved in fire risks assessments as it would be something proactive they could do to prevent accidents happening in future. Safety Representatives could also be involved in other risk assessments undertaken by the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing team.

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

## 11. AOCB

Overnight Accommodation – the Staff Side appreciated that the Council was facing significant financial challenges and had to make savings, but this had to be balanced with health and safety considerations. It had been found that the types of overnight accommodation booked for staff on Council business was unsuitable and it was queried how accommodation was vetted prior to being booked.

It was explained that any complaints by a member of staff about overnight accommodation were investigated and the outcome reported back to the member of staff. The Council's Travel Desk were very proactive in managing complaints. The Council would not put staff into accommodation that they knew was inadequate.

Further, there was an approved list of establishments for accommodation, but other accommodation outwith this list was also used if it was better value. Staff had asked that consideration be given to the Council using Airbnb for business accommodation, but there were concerns over health and safety aspects of this as for example, hotels, bed and breakfast and guest houses had to go through a number of checks e.g. fire safety and Airbnb establishments did not. Given the Council had a duty of care to protect staff when they were working it was important that only Council approved accommodation was used.

The Budget Leader advised that he would report back to the Committee at a future meeting on budget considerations relating to business travel and accommodation.

The meeting ended at 1.40 p.m.